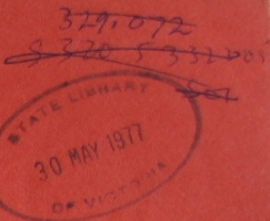


# socialist worker

No. 2 • May-June, 1977 • 60c

THEORETICAL JOURNAL OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL IN AUSTRALIA



Arab women look out from the cell of an Israeli prison.

**Marxism and the National Question p22**

**The Role of Women's Liberation  
in the Fight for Socialism p39**

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NO. 2 • MAY-JUNE, 1977

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## In this issue

The second issue of *Socialist Worker* deals with two broad themes: the Marxist view of the national question (including its concrete application to the Arab struggle); and the relation of the women's liberation movement to the fight for socialism.

As our editorial explains, *Socialist Worker* intends to take up the reactionary Australian nationalist movement in all its ramifications and expose it to the light of Marxist criticism. As a beginning we include in this issue an outline by Dave Holmes of the Marxist view of the national question.

The document on the Arab liberation struggle is a resolution of the Socialist Workers Party Fifth National Conference held in Sydney last January. It is the most clear

and concise statement of how socialists see this struggle yet produced in this country.

Mary-Alice Waters' article carries on from the extensive feminist emphasis of the first issue of *Socialist Worker*. It is reprinted from the US Trotskyist magazine *International Socialist Review*. This is the source of the articles by George Breitman and Elizabeth Stone. All three contributors are leaders of the American Trotskyist organisation (also named the Socialist Workers Party).

Our other contributor to this issue is Fran Jelley, who reviews *Damned Whores and God's Police*. Jelley is a well-known activist in the Sydney women's liberation movement.

## Letters

This column is open to all viewpoints on subjects of interest to our readers. Please keep your letters brief. Where necessary they will be abridged. Please indicate if your name may be used or if you prefer initials instead.

uphill climb; sometimes their survival hung by a thread.

The rejuvenation of its cadres in recent years which I witnessed on my visit there in 1973—and now the appearance of *Socialist Worker*—indicates that our movement is at last coming of age.

I shall look forward to your subsequent issues.

George Novack

### Pleasant surprise

It was a pleasant surprise to open my mailbox and find in it the first number of *Socialist Worker*. Not so much because my article in defense of Engels was reprinted therein (gratifying as that was) but primarily because the launching of its theoretical journal is tangible evidence of the advancement of the forces and ideas of the Fourth International in your country.

The first reliable information about the program of the Communist Left Opposition and its historic struggle against Stalinism came to Australia, I believe, almost half a century ago through copies of our paper *The Militant* that arrived by chance in Sydney. Since then the Trotskyist forces have gone through an arduous and oft-interrupted

### WILPF

Enclosed is my sub. for *Socialist Worker*.

It is possible you have mixed the WILPF (Women's International League for Peace & Freedom) with the WIDF (Women's International Democratic Federation). WILPF was founded in the USA by Jane Addams, a quaker. First international meeting was in 1915. It is left wing but I doubt if it's a "Stalinist movement."

Doreen Aujard

## Get in touch

To contact socialists in your area...

If you would like more information about the Socialist Workers Party or the Socialist Youth Alliance, radical and socialist literature—get in touch with the addresses below:

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215A Thomas St, Haymarket 2000  
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## Editorial

# Australian Nationalism: a Reactionary Ideology

For those of us who learnt some of our earliest political lessons in the struggle against United States and Australian intervention in Vietnam, the concept of "Australian Independence" or "Australian nationalism" has always been particularly repugnant. We reacted with cynicism and argued against all forms of patriotism and national chauvinism with which the Australian ruling class was trying to sell its murderous campaign to the Australian working class. We put forward very vigorously the idea of solidarity with the oppressed of other countries pointing out that the interests of ordinary working people here in Australia as in the United States, coincided with the interests of the workers and peasants of Vietnam and not with the interests of the American capitalist class and its Australian partners in trying to preserve and extend the world imperialist system. To be "Australian" in those days was nothing to be proud of because it meant an identity with the actions of the Australian ruling class and its government in Vietnam. In this way we absorbed the lesson that national identity in our case invariably meant identity with the actions and interests of the Australian ruling class not with our own struggles as workers for a better social system. These ideas seemed elementary.

So it has been with some disgust that we have had to witness the rise in recent years of the "new nationalism" and a patriotic "Australian independence" movement. Such developments must be of concern to revolutionary socialists because they represent a potentially dangerous

diversion for the working class and its allies. They help to foster the illusion that there is some unity of interests between the Australian working class and the Australian capitalist class and a basis for common struggle between a so-called "progressive" section of this capitalist class and Australian workers against "foreign" interests.

### Maoist campaign

It is not surprising to find that the most ardent supporters and vigorous builders of this Australian independence movement come from the Maoist forces around the country. This is most definitely their chief campaign and has been for several years now and fits very well into the classic pattern of Stalinist class-collaborationist politics, that is, support for one wing of the bourgeoisie against another, and revolution by stages (firstly, we fight the foreign capitalists and establish a "democratic" and "independent" Australia and later on we tackle the local bourgeoisie and establish socialism). Of course, the other error the Maoists lead their supporters into in their Australian independence movement is support for the narrow bureaucratic interests of the Chinese regime in its rivalry with the Soviet bureaucracy. This is exemplified by their hysterical campaign against "Soviet social imperialism" which they place on a par with US imperialism. These are cast as the two "super powers" straining to capture the greater share of Australia's resources and sending poor struggling Australian companies to the wall. In

this utterly reactionary campaign they join hands with the most rabid right-wingers.

It is perhaps in the student movement where cultural patriotism has most taken on, that the Australian independence movement lets it all hang out. *National U*, the national publication of the Australian Union of Students, currently under Maoist editorship, and various Maoist campus newsheets treat us to Blinky Bill comic strips decrying Mickey Mouse, Coca Cola and Mc Donalds, and moving pieces of writing in praise of billabongs, wattle and flannel flowers.

### The Eureka tradition

The most well-known symbol of the current Australian independence movement, of course, is the blue and white Eureka flag. The origins of this flag, with its roots in the miners' struggles at the Eureka stockade last century, were not reactionary ones. But this flag has today taken on a different and bourgeois significance. These flags, along with Australian independence banners, taint every radical demonstration. Unfortunately the Eureka symbol and many of the ideas of the Australian independence movement have found some appeal among quite a wide layer of people.

On the surface it obviously appears to many people, including many genuine working class activists, as a progressive campaign. The confusion on this question could be seen clearly for example, on November 11 last year at rallies called to note the anniversary of the sacking of the Labor Govern-

ment the year before. The Socialist Workers Party brought out a badge bearing the message "The working people have no country"—Karl Marx in an attempt to counterpose an international working class perspective to Australian nationalism. Many people praised the badge and bought it eagerly, promptly pinning it alongside their Eureka badge. When the contradiction was pointed out to some there was usually a very serious and thoughtful response.

### The issues at stake

What are the critical class questions at stake in the Australian nationalism debate? Why do revolutionaries insist that this campaign has absolutely no progressive features and cannot advance the interests of the Australian working class? The Maoists and other conscious Australian independence supporters start from the premise that Australia is a colonised country. (In two issues of *National U* this year, two articles refer to Australia as a Third World country and one as a Second World country (1)) This of course is crass nonsense. Australia began as an outpost of British imperialism. The white settlers slaughtered and subdued the indigenous population who today are still engaged in a struggle, not only for land rights and the preservation of their culture, but for their very survival. These are the real colonised people of Australia. White Australian society and industry developed in an isolated and therefore relatively protected way, as a primary producing country with its manufacturing industry developing behind high tariff walls. The labor movement, likewise protected by strict immigration laws, was able to win a relatively high standard of living which it has largely maintained in relation to other advanced capitalist countries. Historically, Australia has always had a high level of overseas investment.

While Australia is a small country, it is an advanced capitalist country in junior partnership with British, US and Japanese capitalism. In addition, it has emerged over the past few decades as an increasingly significant imperialist force in the South-East

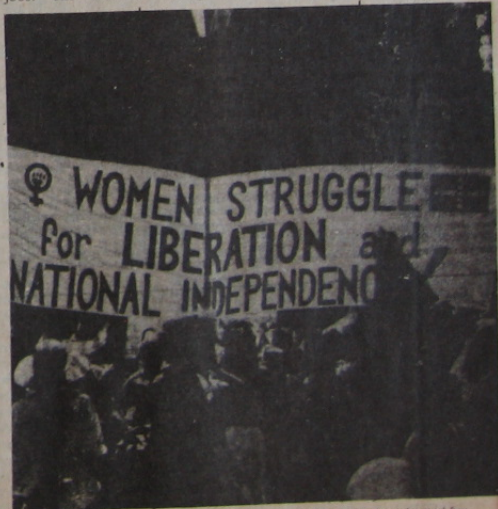
Asian and Pacific region in particular. All that the demand for Australian independence means is to demand that Australian imperialism develop a more independent road in its exploitation of these regions, less directly subordinate to the bigger capitalist powers. It means nothing for the Australian worker, except perhaps a change in paymaster. Is it somehow less oppressive to work for an Australian boss than an overseas one? The Maoists seem to think so.

Others on the left also put forward the mistaken idea that it is part of the business of the labor movement to help juggle this crisis-ridden economic system. Part of the strategy of last year's "People's Budget" and this year's "People's Alternative Economic Program" being put forward by the Communist Party of Australia and the unions in which it has influence is to advocate a "restructuring" of the capitalist economy in order to save jobs. The overseas mining cor-

porations and multinationals are squeezing the small Australian manufacturers out of existence and so contributing in a major way to unemployment. Thus we are meant to support economic policies in defence of these failing sectors of the economy. Socialists should never put themselves in a position of advocating the better management of the capitalist economy. We put forward only those solutions that directly benefit the working class and encourage its self-organisation, and lead in the direction of socialism.

### Labor's new nationalism

In its recent period of office the Federal Labor Government did much to promote a new economic nationalism. It tried to make mileage from the issue of foreign ownership of Australian industry and the behind-the-scenes political role of the multinationals. But this promotion of



Struggle for socialism, not "national independence" is main strategic road for workers and their allies.



economic nationalism presented merely another way of deflecting attention from the real needs of the working class, that is to completely throw off their exploitation. Instead it helped focus the feelings of anger and opposition to this exploitation on *foreign control* as the real source of workers' problems. Among other things, the use of this question of foreign domination is a very effective ploy for the reformist parliamentary and trade union leaders in diverting the attentions of the ranks of the labor movement from the treacherous role of their leaders. Nationalism has quite a long tradition in the Australian Labor movement as a pro-imperialist, pro-militarist and thoroughly racist ideology. The first Labor Premier of New South Wales, McGowen expressed it in the following way: "While Britain is behind us, and while naval power is supreme, Australia will be what Australians want it—white, pure and industrially good." (Quoted in Humphrey McQueen's *A New Britannia*.) The most overt expressions of this racism have receded although they have by no means disappeared. Instead, Labor in power uses more subtle methods to enforce its updated White Australia policy. Labor's "new nationalism" in all its aspects is fundamentally reactionary. All it can do is to deceive the working class into thinking that there is such a thing as a "national interest" that stands above their class interests and can be built by an alliance that crosses class lines.

Australian workers have no more in common with the Rupert Murdoch and Sir Ian McLennans than they have with the Nelson Rockefeller of this world, but if anyone stands to gain from an Australian nationalist campaign it is surely the former who are part of a firmly entrenched Australian ruling class wielding its own state power. It is they who are provided with direct advantages and more room to manoeuvre by a campaign favoring Australian, as opposed to foreign, industry. And they aren't about to pass on any extra profits to Australian workers. More likely, they will step up their investments in some country where resources and labor are cheaper.



Original Eureka struggles were not reactionary but today Eureka flag is used to divert mass movement from struggle against Australian bosses, the main enemy.

And even more obvious, in the final instance it is the *Australian* capitalist class that workers here will have to confront because it is this class that directly maintains class oppression in this country and will use any means to protect their own position. There is no principled revolutionary stand apart from an internationalist one that puts unwaveringly class interests before any form of national interest.

### The nationalism of the oppressed

Failure to make a distinction between the reactionary nationalism of an oppressor nation and the nationalism of an oppressed people fighting for liberation is at the centre of the error involved in the Australian independence campaign. Colonised people suffer a total political, economic and cultural oppression—the Irish, the Black South Africans and the Palestinians are some of the most obvious that spring to mind. The struggle of these people against all these aspects of their oppression is profoundly revolutionary. The tasks of these groups in throwing off throwing off their national oppression are also completely tied up with other tasks of social liberation. National liberation will not be achieved short of far-reaching revolutionary changes, social and economic. The struggle of the Vietnamese people is a perfect example of this process. The Vietnamese had to take up arms against the Japanese, the French and the Americans even to win the most elementary national rights such as political independence, free elections

and unity of the country. And to carry these struggles to a successful conclusion the Vietnamese people had to achieve the overthrow of their own bourgeoisie as well as their colonial rulers.

In a country like Australia, however, where national independence has long been established and an entrenched Australian capitalist class rules in its own right, a campaign of nationalism serves no function but to support and strengthen the bourgeoisie.

In this issue Dave Holmes discusses in some detail the views of genuine Marxism and Leninism with respect to the national question. Due to the extreme complexity of this question and the degree of confusion about it in all corners of the working class movement we hope to publish several more relevant articles in future issues. In particular, we intend to run a series of articles taking up the issue of Australian nationalism from different angles and in some depth—economic nationalism, Australian culture and the politics of Australian nationalism. Clarity on this question is essential if we are not to see a serious disorientation and undermining of the struggle of the Australian working class and radical movement by the insidious ideologies of racism and national chauvinism.



Arabs demonstrate in Jerusalem (1970).

# The Socialist Revolution in the Arab East

Resolution adopted by the Fifth National Conference of the Socialist Workers Party, January, 1977

The Arab East is a focal point of the world revolution. In this region, the contradictions created by imperialism are so intense that they have repeatedly exploded into large-scale military conflicts. These contradictions can be permanently resolved in only one way: by the complete expulsion of imperialism from the Arab East, that is, by the victory of the Arab revolution.

The vast natural wealth of the region,

particularly in oil, gives the Arab East a special importance in the imperialist world system. The Arab East supplies the bulk of the capitalist world's consumption of petroleum and contains more than three quarters of the world's known oil reserves.

Arab oil is not only a source of enrichment for the imperialists. It has a tremendous strategic value, both in terms of potential imperialist war against the workers' states or national liberation



movements and also in terms of inter-imperialist rivalries. US imperialism, which dominates the industry, used its control over Mid-East oil to improve its position substantially vis-a-vis its Western European and Japanese competitors in the post-October 1973 "energy crisis."

Another consideration of the imperialists is the strategic location of the area. Situated at the crossroads between Europe, Asia and Africa, the Arab East is key to transport and communication between these continents. Control over the Suez Canal, for example, is regarded as central to any imperialist war plans. The proximity to the Soviet Union makes it even more important.

The importance which the imperialists attach to "their" interests in the Arab East was indicated during the October 1973 war when Nixon called a world-wide nuclear alert, openly threatening the Soviet Union with nuclear war, over what Washington regarded as an intrusion into its sphere of influence. During the last two years, the US ruling class has conducted a semi-public discussion of the practicability of occupying Arab oil fields militarily if events should seem to make this necessary.

For three decades, the focus of Arab resistance to imperialism has been the struggle of the Palestinians to regain the homeland from which they were expelled by the Zionist colonial-settler state of Israel. But other struggles that have erupted demonstrate that the conflict with imperialism involves all the Arab nationalities, not just the Palestinians.

In Lebanon, for example, the oppression of the caste system created by French imperialism forced the Moslem majority to defend itself by military means. In the Lebanese civil war, the predominantly Christian elite enjoyed the unqualified military and diplomatic support of imperialism and its agents in their attempts to suppress the demands of the oppressed majority. In this battle, it was to be expected that imperialism and its Lebanese agents would focus a large part of their fire on the Palestinian resistance organisations, and that the latter would find common cause with the Lebanese fighters against the defenders of the status quo.

Contradictions between the oppressors and the oppressed have also reached the point of armed struggle at the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula in Dhofar, where a conflict is raging between anti-government rebels and imperialism's local agent, Sultan Qabus. British troops are actively participating in this war.

In addition to the British troops in Dhofar, imperialism maintains several other outposts not only in the Arab East but also at its edges, with the Shah of Iran playing the role of hired gun for US imperialism's interests in the region.

It is impossible to understand the forces at

work in the Arab East without recognising that the present political structure of the region is the creation of European imperialists, who carved the Arab nation into separate states during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The maintenance of these artificially created states in the face of the evident desire of the masses for Arab unity is a form of oppression of all Arab nationalities, in addition to the other oppressions they may suffer as the result of economic exploitation by Western capitalism or the depredations of Zionism. The national unity achieved by the metropolitan powers in their bourgeois revolution has been forcibly denied to the Arab nation by these very same powers.

The winning of formal independence by these artificially created states changed nothing of substance in this situation. The Arab world is still divided despite the wishes of the overwhelming majority of its inhabitants. Moreover, experience has proven that formal political independence by itself is insufficient to give the masses of any of these states control over even their own resources, let alone their destinies. Even when resources have been nationalised by bourgeois capitalist governments, imperialist control of the world market has prevented any of the Arab states from significantly improving its economic situation in the long run. The most telling example of the helplessness of the natural-resource-producing countries to wrest anything from the imperialists has been provided by the rapid drain out of the OPEC countries of the capital that flowed in following the post-October 1973 rises in oil prices.

Imperialism's division of the Arab world, created and maintained to facilitate economic exploitation, is an obstacle to any form of economic or social progress. In each of the artificial states, imperialism created or propped up reactionary defenders of the status quo: state bureaucracies, aspiring capitalists, semi-feudal sheikhs, clergy, etc. All of these layers feel threatened by the prospect of Arab unity, which would do away with their privileged positions. But for the Arab masses, the way to liberation is through a unification of all the Arab people, a process which will assemble a vast quantity of natural and human resources.

For the Arab masses, the ties of common language, history and culture that bind them together are a living reality. Time and time again they have expressed their support for unification. The massive popularity enjoyed by a leader like Nasser throughout the Arab world whenever he took a stand for pan-Arabism is an indication of this popular sentiment.

Revolutionary Marxists encourage and support this type of nationalism, which is a form of struggle by the oppressed against their op-

pressors. The nationalism of the oppressed is not, as is sometimes maintained by sectarians, "bourgeois" nationalism. In this epoch of decaying capitalism, it is impossible for the national bourgeoisie to lead a national liberation struggle to a successful conclusion. A nation ceases to be oppressed only when it gains full control over its natural resources and economy by breaking free of the stranglehold of the capitalist world market. Only a socialist revolution can wrest control of the economy away from the imperialists.

Trotskyists have every reason to be proud of the history of our movement and its record on this question of Arab unification. Arab unification was part of the program of the Communist International in 1923, although it was wiped out by the Stalinists in 1928. This view of the central importance of unification was revived by the Palestinian Trotskyists in the late 1930s. The Palestinian Trotskyists held the view that the struggle for Arab unification was a key task for revolutionary communists in the area. Discussion on this point took place during World War II not only among Palestinian Trotskyists but also among Egyptian Trotskyists who communicated with the Palestinian comrades through members and supporters in the British army.

Imperialism's legacy poses a number of key tasks ahead for the Arab revolution. The first task is unification of the whole Arab nation. This is the aspiration of the Arab masses, who were



Lebanese family in the ruins of their home after Israeli attack

never consulted about the division of the Arab world. While it is always possible that the continued existence of the various Arab states might at some stage result in the formation of different and distinct national identities—as happened in Latin America—the present reality is that the desire for Arab unity is far stronger than the embryo of any such separate nationalism.

In order to achieve national unity, the Arab revolution will have to do far more than merely dismantle the states created by imperialism. Arab unity is obviously incompatible with the existence of an imperialist outpost in the midst of the Arab world: A democratic, secular Palestine will replace the exclusivist state of Israel.

But the overcoming of Zionism is only a part of the task. All of the feudal rubbish which has been maintained by imperialism must be swept away. In particular, the anti-imperialist revolution that unites the Arab people will find it necessary—on both principled and pragmatic grounds—to champion the rights of Arab women and of other oppressed nationalities within the Arab world.

The semi-human status of women in most Arab states will be eliminated by the Arab revolution—a prediction that has already been confirmed by the role of women in the Palestinian resistance. By its support for the liberation of women, the Arab revolution will shatter the reactionary influence upon the masses of Islamic religious leaders and will enlist on its side the tremendous revolutionary energies of one half the Arab world.

Just as it created the various Arab states in order to divide and rule, imperialism deliberately included non-Arab peoples within the boundaries of several of those states, the Kurds and the Southern Sudanese being the two most obvious examples. It should be obvious that a real national liberation movement of the Arabs cannot help but support the same right of self-determination for other oppressed peoples. Moreover, any attempt to retain non-Arabs in a pan-Arab state against their will would tend to convert these potential allies in the struggle against imperialism into enemies.

### Kurdish self-determination and the Arab revolution

The question of Kurdish self-determination has tended to create considerable confusion among many supporters of the Arab struggle. We regard our support for the Kurds' right of self-determination as part and parcel of our support for the Arab revolution.

The Kurds, a non-Arab Moslem people, are an





Israeli armed forces on parade.

oppressed nation. In Iraq, where the main Kurdish struggle has taken place, the Kurds are obvious victims of discrimination. While Kurds form 25 per cent of the population of Iraq, only 3 per cent of Iraqi industry is situated in Kurdistan. Only 7 per cent of university students are Kurds. These two examples are only the tip of the iceberg.

Kurds are also oppressed in the other parts of Kurdistan, which extends into Iran, Turkey, the Soviet Union, and Syria. In all these places, the regimes actively campaign against Kurdish national rights. In Turkey and Iran, for example, the Kurdish language is banned from official use. The Kurds have a long history of struggle against their oppression. British planes were used to quell a rebellion by the Kurds in the 1920s, and an active movement for Kurdish self-determination has been in existence ever since that time, with later rebellions taking place in 1946, 1958, 1961 and 1974.

Many Arabs who have radicalised around the struggle of the Palestinian people and the civil war in Lebanon do not yet see the similarities between the Palestinian and Kurdish situations and are opposed to the Kurds' national aspirations. The Iraqi regime, which conducted a brutal war against the Kurds in 1974-75, has used nationalist and militant left demagoguery to sway many Arabs away from supporting the Kurds. In addition, Moscow, which gives political support to the Iraqi Ba'athist regime, has propagated the idea that the Kurdish struggle is counterrevolutionary.

But the main fact used against the Kurdish struggle has been the acceptance of aid from various reactionary sources, including the US Central Intelligence Agency and Israel. "Communists" who use this fact to brand the Kurdish struggle as reactionary are either hypocrites or ignorant of history. Lenin accepted the aid of German imperialism in the form of transportation in 1917, but those who branded him a tool of imperialism because of this incident were not the revolutionaries.

It would be absurd and self-defeating for the leaders of any progressive struggle to deny themselves, on principle, the right to take advantage of contradictions between the imperialists and to accept aid from any place from which it can be obtained. (Whether this is tactically wise in a particular instance is of course another question.) The Kurdish struggle deserves support because it is a struggle against oppression. For revolutionaries, and for anyone who simply opposes national oppression, that should be the central question. Questions such as the nature of the struggle's present leadership or the sources of aid are distinctly secondary. The Kurds' acceptance of aid from the CIA no more makes the Kurdish struggle reactionary than acceptance of aid from semi-feudal regimes in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates makes the PLO an agent of feudalism.

The history of the Kurdish struggle clearly demonstrates its anti-imperialist dynamic. In 1946, the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad faced the combined aggression of Iranian, Iraqi and British forces. It was then led by the same Mustafa Barzani whom the Stalinists and supporters of the Iraqi regime now brand as an imperialist agent. (Barzani fled to the Soviet Union and lived there for ten years.) In 1958, Kurdish nationalists participated in the uprising that overthrew the Hashemite king. Since 1961, the Kurdish nationalists have fought against the reactionary regime of Kassem, then against the Ba'athists and then the Aref regime.

When the Iraqi Ba'athist regime came to power in 1968, it was preoccupied with eliminating any potential opposition, especially, the guerrillarist-oriented Communist Party. It therefore offered a number of concessions to the Kurds in order to gain time to carry out its murderous campaign against the left. Agreements signed in 1970 granted the Kurds significant autonomy and recognition of national rights such as use of their language. Had these agreements been observed, they might have even convinced a majority of the Kurds that it was desirable to remain within the Iraqi state. But the government never intended to implement the agreement, and when the Kurds refused to accept the government's unilateral changes in

1974, the regime launched a genocidal war against them. The Ba'athists were aided in their war by the Shah of Iran, who in exchange received a favorable settlement of a border dispute with Iraq.

Having conquered national unity, equality for women, and the right of self-determination for other oppressed nationalities in the region, the Arab revolution will be able rapidly to overcome the imperialist legacy of underdevelopment. This will involve an extensive agrarian reform, rapid industrialisation (a task made easier by the abundance of energy resources) and a massive program to wipe out illiteracy and increase the educational level of the poor.

## Zionism

From its beginning, the Zionist colonisation of Palestine was consciously encouraged by imperialism, particularly British imperialism, as part of its divide-and-rule strategy in the Arab East. The imperialists foresaw that the colonists could provide a reliable base of support against anti-imperialist struggles by the Arab people. Since the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, the Zionists have created a veritable fortress for imperialism, from which raiding parties periodically venture in order to "teach a lesson" to troublesome "natives" who appear to threaten some imperialist interest—as in 1956, 1967 and today in Lebanon.

**"Israel . . . is the primary weapon with which the neocolonialists hope to defeat the Arab revolution and maintain their control over the Arab world."**

Israel is thus far more than a legacy of imperialism. It is, today, imperialism's chief base of operations against the Arab world. Financed, armed and supported by imperialism, chiefly US imperialism, it is the primary weapon with which the neocolonialists hope to defeat the Arab revolution and maintain their control over the Arab world.

The chauvinist, racist ideology of Zionism made it suited for this role. From its inception in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century to the present day, the Zionist movement has had as its goal the establishment of an exclusively Jewish state in territory seized from the Palestinians. Unlike the European colonisers of the Black Africa, who saw the masses of the oppressed African nations as a source of superprofits through superexploitation, the Zionists for a long time regarded the Palestinians

only as obstacles to be cleared out of the way, in much the same way that a farmer regards a large rock or a tree in the middle of his cornfield. In this respect, the Zionist colonisation of Palestine has been quite similar to the European colonisation of North America, Australia and New Zealand.

In attempting to achieve the aim of an exclusivist Jewish state in Palestine, the Zionists were inevitably forced into alliance with the only force that had both sufficient means to assist them and a vested interest in their success: imperialism. Tragically, the inescapable alliance between Zionism and Western capitalism has converted Jews who fled to Palestine to escape the horrors of European anti-Semitism into agents of the same capitalism which is responsible for the perpetuation of anti-Semitism. In fact, Zionists have often allied themselves with known anti-Semites who find the Zionist utopia an attractive way of solving their "Jewish problem"—by transferring Jews to Palestine and forcing the Palestinian and other Arab people to pay the price for the crimes of Western capitalism. The shameful collaboration of Zionism with the Nazi forces during World War II, and more recently, with reactionary anti-Semitic regimes like Vorster's and Pinochet's, are the logical and inevitable outcome of Zionism's attempt to "solve" the oppression of Jews by oppressing another people.

Zionism's intimate ties with imperialism mean that it is not even capable of filling the one role which is offered as the justification for its existence: the defence of persecuted Jews. Jews living in Israel are placed, willy nilly, in the front lines of a war between imperialism and the Arab Revolution, where they stand in the trenches of their oppressors rather than on the side of their enemy's enemy. The Israeli Jews are the cannon fodder of those responsible for anti-Semitism on a world scale. The Jewish "refuge" is a death trap, and was never intended as anything more by those who made it possible. For Jews living outside Israel, the existence of the Zionist state is at best irrelevant and at worst an aid to the enemy in the fight against anti-Semitism. The most glaring example at the moment is provided by the plight of Argentine Jews, who are the victims of an anti-Semitic pogrom whipped up with the support and encouragement of the Videla dictatorship. The Israeli government has not even issued a diplomatic protest, let alone trying to mobilise international public opinion against the outrage. The reason is clear: Videla and the Zionists both serve the same master.

Anyone who doubts the reactionary and racist nature of Zionism—the latter aspect so obvious that even the United Nations has had to recognise it—need only look at its record in



occupied Palestine, including the assassination of Palestinian leaders, the massive expulsion of Palestinians in 1947-49, the infamous Law of Return which gives citizenship to all Jews—whatever their place of birth—but denies it to Palestinian Arabs, the land expropriation and increasing superexploitation of Arab labor in the post-1967 period.

But the fact that most Israeli Jews are at present captives of Zionist ideology does not at all imply that revolutionaries can or should write off the Jewish working class of Israel. Hebrew-speaking Israeli workers enjoy a privileged position in comparison to Palestinian or other Arab workers, but in the long term they are victims, rather than beneficiaries of Zionism. Even in the immediate period, Israeli Jewish workers are being taught by the assaults on their standard of living that Zionism requires their increasing exploitation. The winning of the Jewish working class to the side of the revolution will require the most fundamental break with all aspects of Zionist ideology, transforming Jewish workers into champions of the cause of Palestinian self-determination. This perspective is not at all utopian, for it is already possible to see the beginnings of movements which openly or implicitly challenge major props of Zionist ideology and rule. The demands of the anti-imperialist movement have an obvious anti-Zionist dynamic. Even relatively limited democratic demands, such as the demand for the abolition of censorship, have a potential for mobilising Israeli Jews against their rulers. The women's liberation movement also has an anti-Zionist character, challenging the racist arguments about demography and the higher Arab birth rate which are cited as justification for denying Jewish women the right to control their reproductive functions. A revolutionary party popularising such demands can play a major role in winning Israeli Jews to the side of the Arab revolution.

This point has been understood by the Palestinian resistance movement, which has made various attempts to reach Israeli Jews. The resistance has made special reference to the position of Israeli oriental Jews as second-class citizens and their oppression by the predominantly European Zionist leadership.

### The Palestinian revolution and the right to self-determination

The struggle of the Arab people to achieve their right of self-determination is an anti-imperialist struggle, a progressive movement whose dynamic leads it in the direction of rooting

out all facets of imperialist oppression, including the power of the indigenous capitalists. Revolutionaries give their unconditional support to this progressive struggle, and in particular its central focus, the struggle of the Palestinians for self-determination.

The Palestinian people are the most direct victims of Zionism and imperialism. As a result of the Zionist occupation of their homeland, most Palestinians live as refugees outside the borders of their country. Those who remain in Palestine live either under Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip or as third-class "citizens" in Israel.

As a separate entity, Palestine was carved out of the Turkish province of Syria by the Sykes-Picot, British-French agreement in 1916. The country was further divided in 1922, when Transjordan was split off and given to the Hashemite Sheikhs, British imperialism maintained its control over the Palestinian economy and army.

Palestinian national consciousness grew rapidly in the hot-house atmosphere provided by the constantly increasing numbers of Zionist colonial-settlers. Economic development in the Jewish sector concurrent with a decline in the Arab sector produced strong Palestinian opposition to British colonial authorities and to further Jewish immigration. This was expressed in demonstrations as early as 1921. A renewed Palestinian upsurge in 1929 included military actions. By 1936, following massive Jewish immigration from Germany (made inevitable by the refusal of all the imperialist powers to open their doors to any significant number of these refugees from Hitlerism, there was a full-scale Arab revolt, which included a six-month general strike.

A major factor in the failure of these mass struggles to achieve their goals was the weakness of the Palestinian leadership. The Zionists contributed quite deliberately to this weakness by their policy of assassinating Palestinian nationalist and labor leaders, but in the final analysis what was missing was a revolutionary socialist party with a mass following among the oppressed industrial workers, agricultural workers, and dispossessed farmers. In the absence of such a party, leadership of the Palestinian struggle fell into the hands of the most backward section of the petty bourgeoisie and the privileged clergy, typified by the Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin el-Husseini and Ahmed Shukairy. These misleaders disarmed the Palestinian masses by promising them an easy victory, which was to be served up by the armed forces of the Arab states rather than achieved by their own efforts. The petty-bourgeois leadership further demonstrated its inability to lead a real

struggle even on a purely military level by failing to arm Palestinian villages against the continuous raids of the Zionist terror gangs.

Despite the hopes of the Zionists, however, the forced exiling of the bulk of the Palestinian people from their homes in 1947-49 did not succeed in destroying the Palestinians' sense of national identity. On the contrary, after three decades of exile—and three decades of struggle to regain their homeland—Palestinian nationalism is today stronger than ever, among both Palestinians in exile and those living in Zionist-occupied territory.

Revolutionaries support Palestinian nationalism because it is directed against imperialism and its agent, just as we support all struggles of oppressed nations against those who oppress them. In giving our unconditional support to the Palestinian struggle, we make it perfectly clear that the enemy is not the Israeli Jews, but Zionism and the imperialism of which Zionism is a junior partner.

This distinction, which is obvious to revolutionaries, needs emphasis because of the Zionist attempts to equate anti-Zionism with the racist ideology of anti-Semitism. The reality, of course, has been that the goal which has emerged as the expression of Palestinian self-determination is a democratic, secular Palestine, that is, a Palestine in which there are no privileges or oppression based upon race, nationality, or religion—the very opposite of the racist "Jews only" state of Israel.

So called "left" Zionists have attempted to sell a variation of the theme that "anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism" to supporters of the Palestinian revolution by arguing that the solution to the "Middle East problem" is support for the national self-determination of both Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews. The only logical basis for such an argument, whether or not it is openly expressed, is the contention that the Palestinian struggle for self-determination threatens the legitimate rights of the Israeli Jews as Jews, that is, that Palestinian anti-Zionism is, or will become, anti-Semitism. This contention is on a par with, and motivated by the same interests as, Washington's repeated claim that Vietnamese rule of Vietnam would mean a "bloodbath."

The other side of this unfounded argument is the claim sometimes advanced by "left" Zionists that Zionism is the "national liberation movement" of the Jewish people. As the preceding section of this resolution points out, Zionism is in reality the very opposite of a liberation movement. Far from liberating the Jewish people, it harnesses those Jews who embrace it to the imperialist chariot.

Despite their obvious conflict with reality,

these Zionist arguments can always gain a certain hearing because they conform perfectly to the classical liberal attitude, which favors improving the lot of the oppressed provided only that in the process of improving their situation, the oppressed don't rock the boat. Liberalism of this sort condemns equally and "impartially" imperialist oppression and the rage of the downtrodden against their oppression. To the liberals, an impolitely expressed hatred of white or Zionist exploitation is "Black racism" or "anti-Semitism," and is therefore to be condemned as upsetting that "dispassionate" view of the world which is so easy to attain when one is—against one's will of course—fed regularly from the scraps of the exploiters' banquet.

As revolutionary Marxists, we view the question quite differently. We understand that racism is something more than benighted ideas in the heads of individuals. Racism is an organised system of oppression imposed on a group because of their shared race or nationality. Members of the dominant race or nationality are not oppressed when their former "inferiors" fight for or attain equality. Israeli Jews will not be oppressed by a democratic, secular Palestine, just as whites will not be oppressed by majority rule in South Africa, and just as white Australians will not be oppressed by Black land rights.

The arguments for self-determination for Israeli Jews amounts to exactly the same thing as



Israeli troops in action in occupied West Bank



the demand for "white South African self-determination" or "white Australian self-determination"; a plea to maintain the special privileges now enjoyed by the dominant nation.

The "left" Zionist support for dual self-determination in Palestine attempts to obscure one highly relevant fact: The present form of self-determination being exercised by Israeli Jews consists precisely of *oppressing the Palestinians*. This situation will continue so long as there is a separate Jewish state in Palestine. Israeli Jewish self-determination is a contradiction, not a complement, of Palestinian self-determination.

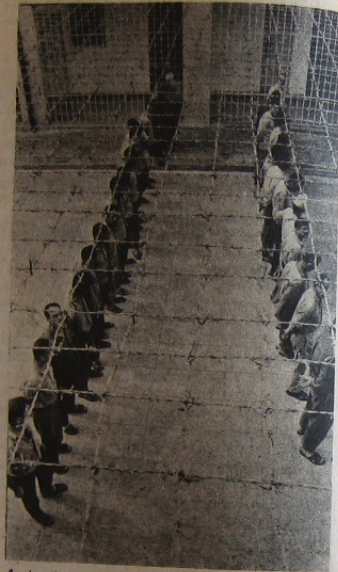
As Leninists, we support the right of oppressed nations to choose the means of ending their oppression. The only "right" we acknowledge for oppressor nations is the right to cease their oppression of others.

Even some genuine revolutionary groups have at times advocated support for the position of self-determination for Israeli Jews. Although this view has been put forward from the perspective of strengthening the anti-Zionist struggle rather than from an accommodation to Zionism, it is still mistaken.

The basic argument of those holding this view has been that the Palestinian revolution must hold out the guarantee of Jewish self-determination in order to win the Israeli Jewish workers away from Zionism and to the side of the Palestinian revolution.

In reality, however, advocating Israeli Jewish self-determination would reinforce rather than weaken the hold of Zionist ideology. If Israeli Jews need the guarantee of self-determination in order to protect their legitimate rights, then this can only mean that the Palestinians, or the Arab nation, have some reason for wanting to infringe upon those rights. Insisting on a Jewish right of self-determination would thus reinforce the Zionist-created myth that Israel is a haven besieged by hordes of bloodthirsty anti-Semites. Nor does this position offer a perspective which might hope to enlist the revolutionary energies of the Jewish working class. To the vast majority of Israeli Jews, self-determination cannot mean anything *essentially* different from their present situation. What motive can they have to endure the sacrifices of revolutionary struggle merely to reproduce the status quo?

More importantly, even when it is presented by anti-Zionists, the argument for dual self-determination fails to understand the whole dynamic of the Palestinian struggle for self-determination. A revolutionary struggle against imperialism necessarily challenges all aspects of the oppressors' rule, from the most trivial to the most profound. This challenge has the potential to begin to break the hold of imperialist ideology on "its" masses. This is what happened in the



Arab prisoners in Israeli jail.

course of the Vietnam war: The anti-imperialist struggle of the Vietnamese fueled the worldwide youth radicalisation and contributed to a rising political challenge to the imperialists within the United States itself.

There is every reason to expect a similar process to occur within Israel as the Palestinian struggle continues to unfold. Israeli Jewish workers will be won to the revolution as the example of the Palestinians' struggle and their own experience forces them to question the assumptions which now dominate their consciousness. The contradiction between the lies of Zionist mythology and the reality of the Palestinian movement can be the catalyst for the radicalisation of Israeli Jewish workers, just as the contradiction between the lies of the imperialists and the reality of the Vietnam war was the catalyst for the antiwar movement in the imperialist countries. This dynamic would be obstructed rather than aided by raising the slogan of Jewish self-determination, which logically implies that there is at least an element of truth in the Zionist position.

## The role of the Arab regimes

Unfortunately for the development of the Palestinian revolution in particular and the Arab revolution in general, the Palestinian resistance organisations and many supporters of their cause have tended to take an inconsistent but usually mistaken view of the governments of the formerly independent Arab states. Viewing these regimes as actual or potential allies, the resistance has generally adopted an attitude of "non-interference" if not of political support for them. Even in the case of overtly reactionary Arab governments, the Palestinian organisations have generally tried to maintain a sort of peaceful coexistence until, as in Jordan, Palestinian survival was put in question by a military assault.

The experience of the Palestinians, not just with Hussein but with the Iraqi, Syrian, Egyptian, and all the Arab regimes, is sufficient evidence that the nature of these governments is anything but a matter of indifference to the future of the Palestinian struggle. A clear understanding of the class nature of these governments is imperative, but has too often been prevented by an acceptance at face value of their radical rhetoric.

### "The most radical of the Arab regimes are not . . . representatives of 'Arab socialism', but petty-bourgeois governments."

While the different Arab governments may occasionally adopt limited anti-imperialist measures, none of them have succeeded in freeing their countries from the imperialist world system, and *none of them intend to*. The most radical of the Arab regimes are not, as they sometimes claim, representatives of "Arab socialism," but petty-bourgeois governments. Their goal is not to break out of the imperialist system, but to secure their national capitalist classes a slightly more favorable position within that system.

This reality is perhaps best illustrated by one of the most "radical" of these governments—that of Nasser. Under Nasser, a large proportion of Egyptian industry was nationalised. The beneficiaries of this nationalisation, however, were not the working class and the rural poor, but the Egyptian capitalists. The industries nationalised by Nasser fell into two categories: those which were unprofitable for the capitalists and those which required a capital investment beyond the means of the Egyptian bourgeoisie.

As soon as state investment—that is, the taxes extracted from the poor—had built these industries to the point where they showed a possibility of profit, they were promptly handed back to private ownership. A similar process of denationalisation took place in Syria in 1961, following the break-up of the United Arab Republic, and again later after the coup that brought the Assad wing of the Ba'ath Party to power.

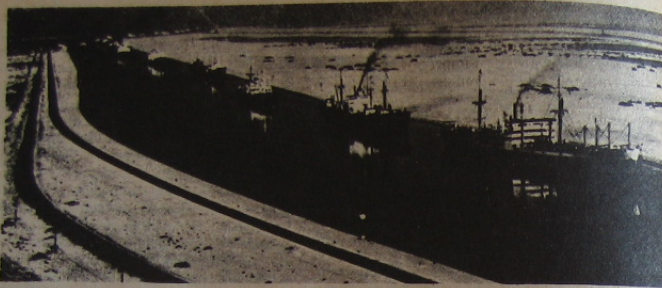
The efforts of Arab nationalist governments to advance the interests of their own capitalists against those of the imperialists can and sometimes do bring these governments into more or less direct conflict with one or more of the imperialist powers. Nasser's nationalisation of the Suez Canal, and the response of British and French imperialism, is an obvious example of such a situation. When such conflicts erupt, the nationalist regimes have virtually no support other than that which they are able to win from the urban and rural working masses. It is this brutal reality which accounts for the frequent anti-imperialist rhetoric of the petty-bourgeois regimes and the much less frequent anti-imperialist actions.

But the Arab nationalist regimes, without exception, fear the mobilisation of the masses even more than they rely upon it. The petty-bourgeois governments rightly fear that once the masses are moved into action beyond a certain point, it will no longer be possible to restrain them. When that impossible-to-define point is passed, the masses will no longer be satisfied with the limited measures proposed by the government, but will—in order to carry out a real struggle against imperialism—root out capitalism in their own country.

In the service of their own bourgeoisies, the Arab nationalist regimes thus attempt to maintain a shaky balance in which the proletariat and its allies are encouraged to oppose one or another imperialist power, but restrained from acting in their own class interest against imperialism, and "their own" capitalists. This is why all the petty-bourgeois nationalist governments—Syrian Ba'athist, Iraqi Ba'athist, Nasserist—came to power by coups rather than with the support of a mass movement. None has been willing to entrust any real power to the masses. On the contrary, they have repeatedly demonstrated their fear of the masses by banning strikes, forbidding political activity outside one official, tightly-controlled party, censoring or prohibiting the working-class press, arresting militant workers, etc.

These petty-bourgeois regimes are not, as they sometimes pretend, the leaders of the Arab revolution, but its mortal enemies. Their fear of the revolution makes them incapable of carrying





Suez canal was nationalised by Nasser. Marxists support and defend all concrete anti-imperialist actions.

out a consistent struggle against Zionism even when such a struggle would serve the immediate interests of their own capitalist classes. With the sole exception of the October 1973 war, none of the "progressive" Arab regimes has ever chosen to go to war against Israel, and in the case of this one exception, their aims were limited to forcing concessions from Israel concerning *their own* territory; the rights of the Palestinians did not come into consideration. Even the limited gains of that war were soon bartered away in exchange for minor concessions—including investments—from US imperialism. Kissinger's diplomatic deals with the Syrian and Egyptian regimes not only leave Israel in possession of most of the territory conquered in 1967, but also provide a UN force to protect it.

Naturally, whenever the government of a semicolonial country—in the Arab world or elsewhere—is forced to take some specific action against imperialism or its agents, revolutionaries wholeheartedly support and encourage that action, but without giving an inch in our opposition to the government involved. This attitude applies at all levels, from the most minor issues up through the question of war against Israel or its imperialist backers.

The fact that Israel and all the Arab countries are capitalist does not at all provide a pretext for Marxists to avoid taking sides when war breaks out or in cases of less dramatic conflict. When the Arab regimes go to war against Israel, they are fighting imperialism *despite* the fact that they do not wish to and have no long-term interest in doing so. Revolutionaries support the real fight that is being waged while warning against the petty-bourgeois leaders who will sooner or later betray the struggle.

The forces of the Palestinian and Arab revolutions have to contend not only with the enmity of imperialism and the timidity of the

petty-bourgeois nationalist leaderships, but also with the treachery of international Stalinism. The record of the Soviet Communist Party and its followers has been a particularly shameful one.

### Stalinism

Prior to the degeneration of the Communist Party in the 1920s, the Bolsheviks had a consistent record of firm opposition to Zionism and all other imperialist machinations. It was the new Soviet government of Lenin and Trotsky, for example, which released from the Czarist files the text of the Sykes-Picot agreement, in which England and France divided Syria between them.

But as the Stalinist bureaucrats consolidated themselves in the Kremlin, "peaceful co-existence" with imperialism and diplomatic deals behind the backs of the masses superseded the Bolshevik policy of support and encouragement for the just struggles of the oppressed. As early as 1944, at the Yalta conference, Stalin demanded the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. At the United Nations, the Soviet government supported the creation of Israel, and it was the supply of weapons from Czechoslovakia which guaranteed the Israeli victory in 1948.

Stalin was never able to reap the diplomatic gains which he expected from his support for the Zionists, but his successors have continued to support the existence of Israel. While they verbally condemn some of the worst excesses of the Israeli racists, the Kremlin bureaucrats still defend Israel's "right to exist" within the borders it conquered in the 1947-49 war, the same line which the Stalinists of the CPA and SPA defend in Australia. On the rare occasions that political considerations force the Kremlin to offer something more than words in support of anti-

Zionism, such support is always channelled through the petty-bourgeois nationalist governments, which can be counted on not to carry out a consistent anti-imperialist struggle.

The pro-Moscow Communist parties in the region faithfully reflect Moscow's attitude. Many of them have provided a left cover for the petty-bourgeois regimes by participating in coalition governments. The Iraqi Communist Party has been part of the government when major military assaults were launched against the Kurds, and the Communist Party of Syria is part of the government which has sent troops to fight in Lebanon against the Palestinians and the Lebanese leftists, including the Lebanese Communist Party.

While the Peking bureaucracy has not been as directly involved as the Kremlin in events in the Arab world, they have made it clear that the politics of Maoism are in no way superior to those of Moscow. For the sake of narrow diplomatic aims, Peking applauded the reactionary coup by Boumediene in Algeria and endorsed the slaughter of Communists in the Sudan. And it is Peking which continues to deify Stalin, Israel's patron. It will be interesting to see whether the current Chinese line that "Soviet social imperialism" is the "main danger" will be applied consistently through some form of overt support for US imperialism's beachhead in the Arab world.

### The rise of the Arab revolution and imperialist reaction

The concept of a democratic secular Palestine, that is, a unitary Palestinian state in which Arabs and Jews coexist without special privileges or discrimination, was advanced as early as the 1930s. But the modern development of the Palestinian resistance can be traced to the mid-1960s. The formation of the Palestinian Liberation Movement (Fatah) and the military actions carried out against Israel marked a new stage in the Palestinian revolution.

The defeat of the Arab armies in the June 1967 war and the consequent Israeli occupation of the remainder of Palestine, the Sinai Peninsula, and the Golan Heights were another turning point. The war shattered the illusion that the Palestinian people would be able to return to their homes behind the victorious army of a Nasser. It became clear that liberation would depend upon their own efforts, and the Palestinians began to take their destiny into their own hands.

The rapid growth of the Palestinian movement was so alarming to the imperialists and those dependent upon them that they took the calculated risk of launching a direct military assault upon the Palestinian resistance in Jordan

in 1970. Jordan provided the obvious choice for the location of this confrontation not only because of the reactionary character of the Hussein regime but also because Palestinians are a majority of the country's population. While Israeli and US military units stood ready to intervene in case they were needed, Hussein's army carried out a murderous attack upon the refugee camps while the "progressive" Syrian regime restrained Palestinian units based in that country from coming to the aid of their compatriots.

But contrary to the hopes of the imperialists, the defeat suffered by the Palestinians in Jordan did not put an end to the Palestinian upsurge. The resistance movement continued to enjoy massive support from the most oppressed layers of the Palestinian nation, particularly in the refugee camps. This was true despite the fact that the resistance leadership disarmed the masses politically, and therefore militarily, by posing the struggle in terms of a "primary contradiction—the struggle against Israel and imperialism—and a "secondary contradiction"—the struggle against the reactionary Arab regimes. In practice, this meant that the Arab reactionaries were left in peace to prepare their attacks upon the Palestinians, who were taken by surprise when the "secondary contradiction," at the moment of its own choosing, suddenly appeared on the scene as the most active agent of the "primary contradiction."

Despite the disastrous experience in Lebanon, the Palestinian leadership continued to act as though it were possible to fight imperialism successfully while remaining on good terms with imperialism's agents. Even organisations which, in retrospect, argued that Hussein should have been overthrown (like the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine), favored a policy of non-interference in Lebanon.

But despite the schematic views of the Palestinian leadership, the 300,000 Palestinians in Lebanon could not help but play a crucial role in Lebanese politics, if only because the Palestinians and the Lebanese Moslem masses are oppressed by the same enemy.

Lebanon itself was created by imperialism. The French occupiers drew the boundaries of the country deliberately to include the maximum amount of territory while still maintaining a Christian majority in the population. The Lebanese Christians were expected to play essentially the same role as that of the Zionist settlers in Palestine: the role of a counterforce to the rising tide of Arab nationalism. The Zionists themselves have consistently recognised the privileged Lebanese Christians as natural allies.

French imperialism's handiwork was concretised further in 1943 by an informal pact



between the dominant religious communities that set up a caste system of government. According to the terms of this pact, which, with minor adjustments, is still in effect today, virtually every governmental and administrative position is reserved for members of a particular religion. Thus, the president is always a Maronite Christian, the prime minister a Shiite/Sunni Moslem, and so on.

The political caste system conforms by and large to the economic realities in Lebanon. While there are of course class divisions within both Christian and Moslem communities, Christians predominate among the big land-owners and capitalists while the majority of the workers and poor peasants are Moslem.

Despite the fact that censuses are not conducted in Lebanon—an effort to maintain the caste system based on a Christian majority—it has long been clear to everyone that Moslems are now a majority of the population. The Moslem masses naturally resent being treated as an oppressed minority even more when it is obvious that they are the majority, and this resentment has been expressed in several mass mobilisations. The largest of such mobilisations, prior to the civil war that began in 1975, was triggered in 1958 by the Iraqi uprising which overthrew King Faisal. In a joint operation, the United States imperialists landed 14,000 marines in Lebanon to quell the civil war there while their British partners carried out a similar operation to protect Faisal's cousin, Hussein.

In 1975-76, however, the relationship of forces was considerably different from what it was in 1958. A major factor in this difference was the Palestinians, who since 1967 have been carrying out actions inside Israel from Lebanese territory and thus providing to the Lebanese masses a living proof that it is possible to deal blows against even the most seemingly invincible enemy. The Lebanese ruling class correctly saw these attacks on the Zionists as a threat to themselves. Not only are the Zionists and the Lebanese Christians equally threatened with the loss of their privileged positions by the rise of the Arab revolution, but Israel has frequently reinforced this point by conducting raids on the Lebanese bourgeoisie. One operation to the Lebanese bourgeoisie. (The operation alone, in December 1968, blew up aircraft worth \$50 million belonging to Middle East Airlines.)

Various attempts by the Lebanese bourgeoisie to curb Palestinian operations against Israel ran into spontaneous mobilisations by the Lebanese masses. A temporary stalemate of sorts was recognised by the 1969 Cairo accords, which allowed the Palestinians to continue attacking Israel but restricted their bases to southern Lebanon.

Anti-Israeli actions from Jordan were halted after the Palestinian defeat there in 1970, and the Assad regime in Syria stopped operations from its territory in 1971. This gave an increased importance to the Palestinian actions launched from bases in Lebanon. Israeli raids into southern Lebanon created a substantial number of Lebanese refugees, as the economy of southern Lebanon all but collapsed. These refugees joined the Palestinians and other oppressed Lebanese in Beirut and other cities as a source of mass dissatisfaction with the government, and particularly with its inability to prevent the Israeli raids, a dissatisfaction that periodically erupted in mass demonstrations.

Rather than deploying its army against the Zionists, the Lebanese ruling class preferred to attack Lebanese workers and peasants, but these repressive actions failed to accomplish their purpose and tended to increase the anger of the masses. In one instance in 1973, a quarter of a million people mobilised against one such use of the Lebanese army.

The increasing cooperation between the Palestinians and the Lebanese working class, marked by such events as the demonstrations of March 1975, and the spreading dissatisfaction produced by unemployment, inflation, and corruption, prompted the right wing to launch its military attack in the hope of stopping the radicalisation.

The leaders of the Lebanese left were able to conduct a determined military struggle against the right-wing forces, but they proved incapable of leading the kind of political campaign that was equally necessary for victory. They failed to popularise a series of political demands designed to undermine the caste system, such as one person-one vote, open all positions to free elections, etc. Their tendency to compromise or evade the central political questions reflected their reformist approach and their goal of maintaining a slightly reformed Lebanese capitalism.

The cause was further set back by the failure of the PLO leadership to link the struggles of the Lebanese and the Palestinians. For example, the lack of political or military support for Ahmed Katib's Lebanese Arab Army—which in March 1976 included 70 per cent of the military forces formerly controlled by the Lebanese state—deprived the Lebanese masses of a potentially extremely powerful ally.

In spite of these advantages offered to them, the rightists proved incapable of accomplishing their goals, and would have suffered military defeat had it not been for the intervention of Syrian troops. The Assad regime had its own reasons for launching the invasion.

Assad felt threatened by the prospect of a

leftist victory in Lebanon. A leftist regime would have encouraged and perhaps aided Palestinian attacks on Israel. This would have put pressure on the Syrian regime to permit similar action from its own territory.

Such a situation would have been a major obstacle to Damascus's plans for a "peaceful solution" of the Palestinian question. The Syrian regime would like to regain its own occupied territory through the conclusion of an agreement involving the creation of a Palestinian mini-state on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip. To achieve this aim, it needs a Palestinian movement that will follow orders.

Assad could not afford to smash the resistance entirely, as this would have destroyed any prospect of bargaining with the Zionists. His aim was to weaken and tame the Palestinians rather than to eliminate them. This is the reason for the apparently contradictory behavior of the invasion force, which directed most of its fire at the Palestinians but at certain times allowed them to regroup to fight again. The fear of touching off massive opposition within Syria imposed the same policy.

Despite the severe setback dealt to the Arab revolution by the Syrian intervention in Lebanon, the imperialists are very little, if any, closer to their goal of finding a "final solution" to the "Palestinian problem."

One proposal being pushed by some of the petty-bourgeois nationalists and supported by the Soviet Stalinists is for the creation of a Palestinian mini-state consisting of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. (In line with this objective, they have ceased using the phrase "democratic secular Palestine" and replaced it with "democratic secular state in Palestine.") While it is not excluded that US and/or Israeli imperialism might accept such a state in the future, they are resisting the proposal at present, even though it is clear that such a mini-state could survive only as a satellite of Israel. The imperialists fear the dynamic of struggle which might be unleashed by even such a purely nominal recognition of the right of the Palestinians to form their own state.

### The Palestinian upsurge

The imperialists' fears are well founded, as the Palestinian demonstrations, strikes and other massive displays of opposition to Zionism over the past two and a half years have shown. This continuing mobilisation has in many respects already put the Zionists and their backers on the defensive.

The first indications of the upsurge to come were visible as far back as 1968 in demonstrations on the West Bank. But the



present mobilisation really began with the demonstrations that followed Yasser Arafat's appearance at the United Nations in November 1974. The Palestinians saw this diplomatic victory as a recognition of their legitimate rights, and they poured into the streets in the thousands to demand an end to the occupation.

An even larger nationalist upsurge occurred throughout 1976. Despite the murderous response of the occupation authorities, demonstrations and other confrontations with the Israeli military continued on a daily basis. A significant feature of this mobilisation was the role played by youth. Most of those who demonstrated against the occupation, set fire to barricades alight, and stoned Israeli soldiers were high-school and even primary-school students.

What stunned the Zionist authorities even more was the upsurge inside "Israel itself"—the territory occupied before June 4, 1967. On the Day of the Land, March 30, 1976, more than half the Israeli-Arab workforce went on strike despite large-scale attempts at intimidation by the Zionist state. Demonstrations took place in numerous villages and in the town of Nazareth. These demonstrations were held to defend Arab land which the Israelis were expropriating as part of a plan to "Judaize" the Galilee.



What distinguished the demonstrations of 1976 was the unity of all oppressed Palestinians. Solidarity actions with the Galilee Palestinians were held wherever Palestinians are present. A new political slogan was raised: "The nation in Khalil (Hebron) is the same nation in the Galilee." This indicates a much stronger nationalist feeling, which, for the first time since the foundation of Israel, encompasses all the Palestinians. The general strike—the first in 40 years—and the subsequent victory of PLO supporters in elections on the West Bank indicate the wide-spread support for the PLO and the Palestinian resistance as a whole as well as the increasing militancy of the Palestinian masses.

The continuing mass upsurge also shows the fatal error of the resistance organisations that, after the 1970 defeat in Jordan, turned to a policy of individual terrorist actions as the way to achieve liberation for the Palestinians. We defend the right of all the oppressed to use whatever means they consider necessary to overcome their oppression. But time and time again, experience has shown that terrorism is counter-productive. The shift of activity into airplane hijackings and similar operations diverted valuable cadres who could have been very usefully involved in attempting to provide political leadership for the Palestinian masses in their day-to-day struggles.

anti-Dayan demonstration in Sydney (1976).



Even worse, spectacular hijackings and kidnappings, with all their attendant publicity, could not help but impress upon the masses the idea that their liberation would be accomplished for them by small armed organisations rather than by their own mass struggles. Such actions therefore worked directly against the goal they were intended to achieve.

The present upsurge has so far failed to realise its full potential in part because of a continuing failure of political leadership. The PLO leadership has failed to popularise the slogan "The nation in Khalil is the same nation in the Galilee" or to put forward demands relating to Arabs in areas occupied by the Israelis. Demands such as the immediate withdrawal of Israeli troops from areas occupied in 1967 or for the return of all land taken by the Zionists since 1948 could have spurred the mobilisation and given it political direction instead of allowing it to drift.

Both in terms of providing leadership for the Palestinian upsurge and in terms of their attitude to the Arab regimes, there is very little difference between the various resistance organisations. None has shown the ability to fill the role of the mass revolutionary socialist party that is needed to lead the Palestinian and Arab revolution to victory. There are no mass Trotskyist parties in the Arab East, but small organisations do exist in Lebanon and Israel. These organisations can be the nuclei of the mass revolutionary Marxist party of the future by demonstrating to the masses and particularly to the militants in the resistance organisations, their ability to put forward the demands and actions that can lead the struggle forward.

### The role of the SWP

As a revolutionary socialist party, and therefore an internationalist party, the Socialist Workers Party considers the defence of the Arab revolution a central aspect of its political activity. We have been active in this struggle ever since Trotskyism was revived as an organised tendency in Australia in the late 1960s.

The first pamphlet ever produced by the Socialist Youth Alliance was Peter Buch's *Burning Issues of the Mid-East Crisis*. We have organised speaking tours for several leaders and supporters of the Palestinian and Arab community. We initiated the first pro-Palestinian motions in the Australian Union of Students and were the first to raise the participation of the General Union of Palestine Students in the Asian Students Association. During the wave of anti-Arab hysteria following the Munich Olympic events, *Direct Action* defended the Palestinians unequivocally. *Direct Action* also played a leading role for pro-Arab forces during the

October 1973 war and acted as an organiser for the student campaigns in 1974 and 1975. Members of the SWP initiated the demonstrations against the PLO ban and participated in building the subsequent demonstrations against Generals Bar-lev and Dayan.

These highlights indicate the importance which the SWP attaches to the defence of the Arab revolution. While revolutionary Marxists around the world take the same attitude because of the Arab revolution's importance in world politics, there are several factors which increase the significance of this issue for Australian revolutionaries.

As a medium-sized imperialist power, Australian capitalism is constantly on the lookout for opportunities to increase its share of the wealth extracted from the colonial and semicolonial countries. The Arab East is not yet a major area of trade for Australian capitalism, but it is one of the fastest growing areas, particularly in terms of exporting agricultural and mineral products. The trial balloons which have occasionally been floated concerning the possibility of sending Australian troops to participate in a United Nations "peace-keeping" force are a sign that Australian capitalism is thinking quite seriously about further expansion in this area.

**"Our perspective is that the majority of Australians can be won to support the Arabs' right of self-determination . . ."**

In addition, the powerful pro-Zionist lobby in this country is a reactionary force whose existence inevitably works to conserve all aspects of Australian politics. This influence is doubly harmful because much of the Zionist strength is concentrated in the labor movement—a fact symbolised by Bob Hawke. For the labor leaders, support to Zionism is a natural part of their overall subservience to capitalism and imperialism, and their record on defending the legitimate rights of the Palestinians has therefore been every bit as shameful as their record in defending Australian workers. It was ALP leader Herbert V. Evatt who presided over the General Assembly of the United Nations that passed the infamous partition resolution. From that point through Whitlam's "even-handed" policy—a euphemism for maintaining the status quo—Australian labor's record has generally been one of moral and material support for Zionism.

But there are important forces present which offer the potential for defeating the Zionist

lobby. Since the end of the Second World War, hundreds of thousands of Arabs have migrated to Australia. The vast majority of these people are workers who do support or can be won to support the Arab struggle against imperialism. Many of them will be receptive to the ideas of revolutionary socialism as well.

In addition, the youth radicalisation of the 1960s and the radicalisation now spreading within the working class promises to provide new layers of Australian allies of the Arab revolution. The antiwar movement in particular gave thousands of people not only some understanding of what imperialism is but also showed them that it can be defeated and taught them something about how this can be done. Precisely because Zionism is a thoroughly reactionary ideology, whole layers of Australians who begin to radicalise around some other issue will be willing to listen to the arguments of anti-Zionists and inclined to support the progressive struggles of the Arab peoples.

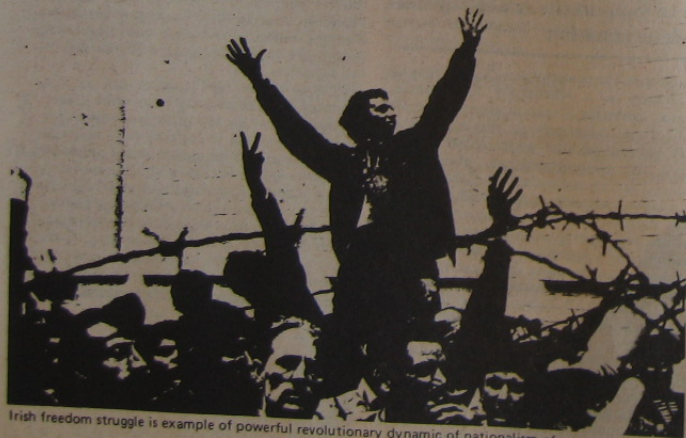
Our perspective is that the majority of Australians can be won to support the Arabs' right of self-determination, just as a majority were won to supporting the right of the Vietnamese to self-determination. The tactics necessary to achieve this goal are essentially the same ones that proved most effective in building the movement against the Vietnam war. We favor united-front campaigns open to all who support the right of Palestinian and Arab self-determination, which constantly try to broaden their numbers by debating and patiently explaining the issues, and which focus on mass actions designed to make it as easy as possible for new people who support the goal to become part of the movement.

Obviously, the SWP cannot call such a campaign into existence merely by wishing for it. At this stage, we are laying the groundwork for the mass movement to come by explaining and defending the Arab revolution in our press and by explaining how to build such a movement to those who already support the Arab revolution. But we are confident that such a movement can and will be built because, like the Arab struggle for self-determination itself, it is part and parcel of the sweeping away of capitalism and imperialism by the oppressed of all the world.



# Marxism and the National Question

By Dave Holmes



Irish freedom struggle is example of powerful revolutionary dynamic of nationalism of oppressed.

From the time of Marx and Engels right up to the present period in the imperialist epoch, the national question has been one of the most important issues confronting revolutionary socialists. Leon Trotsky described the national struggle as "one of the most alabyrinthine and complex but at the same time extremely important forms of the class struggle."

The bourgeoisie has made extensive use of national slogans and ideas to divert the working class from a resolute struggle for socialism and to harness it behind the ruling class and the "national interest." That is one aspect of the national question. But, on the other hand, in our time the national struggles of oppressed peoples have a proven revolutionary dynamic. One of the striking features of the current international political situation is the rise of national liberation struggles in all three sectors of the world. With proper revolutionary leadership these struggles can be a powerful allied force in the proletarian struggle for socialism.

The following talk considers key aspects of the Marxist view of the national question; the origins of the bourgeois nation and bourgeois nationalist ideology; the bourgeois-democratic revolutions and nationalism in the imperialist epoch; the Leninist view of the right of nations to self-determination; and finally national liberation struggles in the various sectors of the world.

## Origins of the bourgeois nation

The nation and national consciousness hasn't always existed. The nation arises from a specific historical phase of the class struggle. As Ernest Mandel explains in his 1971 debate with Maxime Rodinson:

"To identify the national question with existence of the state, the ethnic group, the tribal grouping, or the communal or village association is a complete misuse of language. The Roman Empire was no more an example of a national entity than was the Holy Roman Empire of the Middle Ages. England was not a nation in the twelfth or thirteenth century for the excellent reason that a good part of the language of the people and came from a different stock—the Normans who had conquered England . . . The Marxist view of the question maintains that the nation is the product of a specific class, namely the modern bourgeoisie, the first class in history to give birth to a nation." (Nationalism and Class Struggle in *Direct Action*, March 22, 1972)

The nation has its origin in the class struggle of the rising bourgeoisie against feudalism and precapitalist semi-feudal forces. The rule of the bourgeoisie based on the nation state was first established through a series of revolutionary struggles over some three centuries, extending from the rise of the Dutch republic in the sixteenth century to the American Civil War of the mid-nineteenth century. The bourgeoisie had to shatter the institutions of the old order and the forces based upon them and establish the economic

and political conditions most conducive to their class needs.

In his book *Democracy and Revolution*, George Novack outlines six major tasks of the bourgeoisie in its struggle against feudalism. The primary task was to create a free market where commodities could exchange without any restrictions. Today's national (and international) market is taken for granted but in fact it had to be conquered by the nascent bourgeoisie. In pre-bourgeois societies the free exchange of commodities was restricted by all sorts of medieval privileges and royal monopolies, licenses, taxes and regulations.

The second task of the bourgeois revolution was the transformation of agrarian relations. In order to liberate the productive forces, land had to be converted into a commodity that could be bought and sold without restraint. The landed nobility had to be liquidated and their land taken over by peasants or private landowners of one sort or another.

Linked to the agrarian reform was the ending of serfdom under which the rural laboring population was tied to the land and the lords. Equally important with turning land into a commodity was the conversion of labor-power into a commodity available for free exchange on the capitalist market. Capitalism vitally needed a class of propertyless free laborers available for exploitation by private entrepreneurs.

The fourth task of the forces of bourgeois society was the creation of the sovereign nation-state. George Novack explains this as follows:

"To constitute a national market, provincialism had to be broken down, the small states and petty kingdoms amalgamated or abolished, and uniform coinage, weights and measures, and customs duties established. Restrictive tariffs and tolls levied by governments and privileged landowners had to be lifted for the uninhibited passage of people and goods. . . . The power of taxation had to be centralised and the economic activity of the country stabilised by means of a secure currency and uniform fiscal regulations.

"The struggle against particularism logically led to the unification of the separated or dismembered parts of the nation, as with the United States in the eighteenth and Germany and Italy in the nineteenth century. This demand for national integrity went hand in hand with the struggle for independence from foreign oppressors . . . Thus Holland threw off the despotism of Spain, the United States broke loose from England and Italy cast off the Austrian yoke." (*Democracy and Revolution*, p 54)

Just as today every revolutionary movement, no matter what its nature or origins, is faced with the violent resistance of imperialism, in Western Europe during the transition from feudalism to capitalism all movements of unrest or revolt came up against the Catholic Church which, as well as being a mighty spiritual authority, had immense temporal power and was allied to the most despotic regimes. It was a mighty protector of the outmoded feudal order.



Necessarily, the class struggles against the feudal powers acquired an anti-Rome, Protestant-reformist character. "The cause of religious freedom became fused with the fight for national identity, independence and unification." Shattering the power of the Church was an important task of the bourgeois forces.

Finally the bourgeois revolution had to establish political reforms along democratic lines. The bourgeoisie had to make democratic concessions to the other social forces that had struggled alongside of it—the artisans and tradesmen of the towns, the small farmers and peasants, the embryonic working class. The bourgeoisie had also to establish a political regime that would safeguard and fortify their economic interests. The governmental form most conducive to the stability of bourgeois society was the parliamentary republic.

These were the basic tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution (to use the usual Marxist term). After attempts at reform of the old monarchical-ecclerical structures had failed, the bourgeois dissidents were compelled to resort to their revolutionary overthrow to achieve their aims. The arraying of a sufficiently powerful force to smash the old regime necessitated mobilising the lower classes of the population by arousing democratic and equalitarian sentiments among them, by making them feel that the creation of a new order was the solution to their pressing problems also. Thus the anti-feudal camp comprised a variety of forces. The concept of "the people" that arises out of these revolutions arises out of the concept of the mobilised bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie and the working class counterposed to the aristocracy and/or foreign oppression.

Each component of the revolutionary people had its own class interests and at times severe conflicts developed between these forces in the course of their struggle.

"The bourgeois 'Grandees,'" George Novack explains, "had strictly limited objectives which made all except the most intransigent among them reluctant to push too far and too fast in their conflicts with the guardians of autocracy and kept them ready for compromise. The prime accelerators of the revolutionary process, the originators of the more radical actions and far-reaching democratic proposals, came from the middling and lower layers of the budding bourgeoisie society. Consequently, the plutocratic and plebeian sectors of the bourgeois-democratic movements did not always see eye-to-eye in their strategy, actions and goals. As the struggle intensified, the original partners in the coalition often pulled apart and, at critical junctures, even moved in opposite directions and clashed head-on." (*Democracy and Revolution*, p 51)

The conflicts between the bourgeois-democratic forces and the old order were fought out most thoroughly and conclusively during the period of commercial, merchant, trading capitalism. In the

nineteenth century, during the period of industrial capitalism, the American Civil War triumph of the Union forces was the only significant victory of the radical bourgeoisie won through mass revolutionary struggle. With the rise of the modern proletariat, the risks involved in the popular revolutionary destruction of the old regime became too great for the bourgeoisie. There was increasingly the danger that the proletariat might not stop at the achievement of bourgeois-democratic tasks but might press on to socialist ones. Thus, for instance, the changeover to a bourgeois form of society in Germany and Japan took place, not through revolution, but from above, in a "cold" way. The bourgeoisie made a deal with a section of the landed aristocracy to gain their objectives without having to crush them. The national unification of Germany was carried out by Bismark, the political representative of the Prussian nobility. But the societies that carried out their bourgeois-democratic tasks in this way paid a price in the retention of militarism and lack of democracy generally.

Already we can see in the nineteenth century a change in the social capacities and inclinations of the bourgeoisie. Later on we shall see that the bourgeoisie becomes completely incapable of solving bourgeois-democratic tasks in the imperialist epoch.

## Nationalism

Nationalism is a basic feature of the bourgeois class outlook. This is because the nation-state is the most advantageous medium for the development of the productive forces under capitalism. The bourgeois revolutionists created the modern nation-state. In countries like France and England the framework of the centralised, sovereign state was built up by the absolute monarchy and the bourgeoisie struggled with them for state power. In Holland and the United States, for example, the national territory had to be created by expelling foreign overlords and welding the diverse elements of nationality into a political, cultural and spiritual entity. In either case, the consciousness of a specific national identity was the creation of the bourgeois-democratic revolution and did not exist before.

George Novack gives two illustrations:

"The idea of a distinctive American nationality was hardly mentioned before 1776. This national identity was hammered out by the common experience of armed struggle against Great Britain, the winning of independence and the unification of the thirteen separate colonies into a constitutional republic.

"From 1789 on, revolutionary France provided the exemplary embodiment of 'the national idea.' There the titanic conflicts with the royalists and the foreign interventionists, coupled with the development of the democratic dictatorship and the successes of French arms, filled a reservoir of national feelings to the brim.

France, *la patrie*, was identified with the revolution, progress, enlightenment, popular rule and imperial grandeur." (*Democracy and Revolution*, p 117)

In the period of the great bourgeois-democratic revolutions, both the bourgeoisie and the plebeian masses could identify with nationalism. The lower classes were aroused and drawn into national political life by the struggle against the old order. They saw in the democratic nation the origin of their freedoms, and the greatest opportunities for the development of their own language and culture. The peasants and other small property owners felt they had a private share in the national territory. Indeed, the concept of nationalism was objectively necessary for the bourgeoisie to mobilise the masses against the old order. The lower classes had to feel that their destinies were tied to those of the new national order. One of the currents in the bourgeois nationalism that arose out of the struggle against the old order is that of popular sovereignty, of a fatherland which defends the interests of the whole people and in which all have a stake.

On the other hand, this nationalism is fundamentally tied up with the economic interests of the bourgeoisie, with private property and freedom of trade and enterprise. The bourgeoisie regards the nation-state as the basic economic, political, military and diplomatic instrument which protects its home market and territorial integrity and serves as a launching base for its international operations. The command of state power, the control of the nation, is thus of supreme importance to it. The bourgeoisie uses nationalism to dupe the masses and harness them to its purely bourgeois interests. Its nationalist and patriotism are only a means to profit and the bourgeoisie will repudiate its devotion to the nation when its own interests are threatened.

The French bourgeoisie, for instance, allied itself with the worst enemies of the mass of French people when it set up the Vichy regime to collaborate with Hitler during World War Two. There are many other examples in modern European history of the bourgeoisie collaborating with its supposed national enemies to crush its own working class. After the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, for example, the bourgeois government of defeated France collaborated with the victorious Prussians to crush the insurgent Parisian workers. The security of its system of exploitation is the first loyalty of the capitalist class—its patriotism is for losing the workers.

Nationalism was a tremendous force for overturning the outmoded feudal, monarchical order and stabilising the new capitalist system. In its prime the bourgeoisie national-democratic movement was a powerful promoter of the material, moral and cultural advancement of "the people." Matixism views the completion of the bourgeois-democratic revolutions as an immense historical advance, the expansion of the productive forces and thus the proletariat which it made possible, the solving of the agrarian question;



the drawing into broader political, economic and cultural life of the plebeian masses are all great achievements of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. French nation was created in great revolution.

However, as we have seen, the progressive character and capacities of the bourgeoisie decrease as we move into the era of industrial capitalism. Correspondingly with the decline in the revolutionary potential of the bourgeoisie and the expansion of the capitalist system all over the world, bourgeois nationalism becomes totally reactionary. Only the negative (purely bourgeois) features remain.

Today, nationalism retains its progressive potential only in the backward countries or among nationalities which are subject to foreign oppression or imperialist domination and have yet to achieve their national-democratic revolution.

## National liberation and the imperialist epoch

By the end of the nineteenth century, capitalism had undergone a decisive change. Small-scale production had given way to large-scale production in the leading countries. The classical free competition of the infancy of capitalism had given way to huge monopolies. The giant banks, corporations, trusts and insurance companies dominate the economy and the political life of each country. The various capitalist powers fought for domination of the world market and areas of foreign investment and raw materials sources. They fought to divide up the whole world among themselves and fought for its revision.

Imperialism marks the beginning of the decline of capitalism. The historically progressive mission of capitalism and the bourgeoisie is definitely ended. Capitalism has overflowed the boundaries of the





American Civil War was mass revolutionary struggle.

national capitalist state. Attempts to confine the tremendous social productive forces created by modern science and technology within the confines of the nation-state and private property has led to wars and absolutely unparalleled mass misery in this century. Politically, democracy everywhere comes under attack by reactionary forces. Imperialism, wrote Lenin, meant "reaction all along the line."

The whole world is brought under the sway of the imperialist powers, a handful of countries in Western Europe, North America and Japan. In his report to the Second Congress of the Comintern on the Theses on the National and Colonial Questions Lenin said that:

"The characteristic feature of imperialism is that the whole world . . . is divided into a large number of oppressed nation and an insignificant number of oppressor nations, which command colossal wealth and powerful armed forces. The overwhelming majority of the world's population . . . belong to the oppressed nations, which are either in a state of direct colonial dependence or are semi-colonies . . ." (Lenin on the National and Colonial Questions, p. 31)

In the colonial and semi-colonial countries of the world have been brought into the capitalist world system by imperialism but they have not gone through an independent process of capitalist development such as the imperialist countries went through. Right from the start they were completely dominated by imperialism and their capitalist development was conditioned by the needs of the imperialist bourgeoisie and the metropolitan country. Imperialist domination of the underdeveloped countries is an insurmountable barrier to their capitalist industrialisation and development.

The imperialist domination of the backward countries has meant the blocking of their bourgeois-democratic revolutions and independent capitalist industrial development. Ernest Mandel explains in *Marxist Economic Theory* that "The present structure of the underdeveloped countries is the product of their past and of the particular way in which they have made contact with capitalism. It is thus a matter of combined development—the combination of an ancient regime in dissolution with a capitalism which

carefully refrains from developing industry . . . It is industrial under-development that is the basic flaw in the economy of the under-developed countries. This underdevelopment itself has two roots: first, the fact that foreign capital invests nothing, or almost nothing, in the development of manufacturing industry; and, second, the fact that the indigenous ruling classes themselves prefer to invest in land, trade or usury rather than in building up modern industry." (p.472)

In order to overcome their backwardness on the basis of capitalism it would be necessary for these countries to carry out a major program of industrialisation. But imperialism presents a series of fundamental obstacles to this course: first, the weak capitalist industry in the under-developed countries cannot possibly compete with the assembly-line mass production of the imperialist countries; secondly, the domination of the international investment funds by imperialism which strives to arrange matters so that the third world economies complement rather than compete with their economies; and finally, the international trusts which dominate the third world economies extract the bulk of these countries' surplus value (through direct and indirect means).

### Incapacity of colonial bourgeoisie

Then there is the role played by the bourgeoisies of the colonial and semicolonial countries. In the era of the bourgeois-democratic revolutions the bourgeoisie literally still had to conquer the world for capitalism, that is, it had to create the world market and everything that historically led up to this. However, the third world bourgeoisies come into a world already fully capitalist and dominated by imperialism. The world market already exists and is the preserve of the giant imperialist trusts. Imperialism also dominates the internal market in the colonies and semicolonies. Thus, the bourgeoisies in the backward countries have no real interest in developing industry.

In a talk published in the March 1, 1971 *Intercontinental Press Gazette* Mandel outlines the consequences of this situation:

"The bourgeoisies of the third world countries know that they will get a far bigger return from capital invested in land and real estate, in the leasing of ground to small peasants and even in speculating on international stock exchanges, than from capital expended in sickly industrial enterprises. Therefore most 'native' capital flows toward those fields, where it converges with the greater part of the surplus product accumulated by the semifeudal landlords—when it is not squandered in pure luxury or deposited in Swiss banks.

"For this reason the bourgeoisie of the third world is also opposed to any agrarian revolution. An occupation of the land by the peasants would appropriate not only foreign plantation owners and native oligarchs, but also a mass of manufacturers, merchants, banks, doctors, and rich peasants who see precisely the

purchase of land as their most important capital investment."

What all this means is simply that the third world bourgeoisie is absolutely incapable of carrying out the bourgeois-democratic or national tasks facing these countries. These tasks are basically the development of the productive forces which is predicated on the national independence and agrarian reform. As Trotsky puts it in the *Transitional Program*: "The central task of the colonial and semi-colonial countries is the agrarian revolution, ie, liquidation of feudal heritages, and national independence, ie, the overthrow of the imperialist yoke. Both tasks are closely linked to each other."

### "In our day nationalism retains its progressive character only in backward countries or among nationalities which are subject to foreign oppression or imperialist domination"

Any resolute struggle for national independence, that is, for breaking the imperialist control of the country's economic and political life, must entail the mobilisation of the working and poor peasant masses who constitute the vast majority of the nation. But, as we have seen, such a development would lead to the overturning of capitalist-feudal relations in the countryside and would lead to the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and capitalism. On the other hand any real agrarian reform program would mean the destruction of capitalism and the breaking away from imperialism on account of the intimate connections of the third world bourgeoisie with land-lordism in the countryside.

### Permanent revolution

This is where the theory of permanent revolution first formulated by Trotsky in 1906 comes in. From this consideration of the complete incapacity of the national bourgeoisie in the colonial and semi-colonial countries to lead the oppressed nation in the achievement of its bourgeois-democratic tasks of agrarian reform and national independence, Trotsky stated that these tasks could only be achieved in passing by the urban proletariat rallying behind the poor peasantry and the other oppressed and exploited layers of the population in a struggle for workers power and socialism. (The theory of permanent revolution assigns the leading role to the proletariat over the peasantry because the dispersed and divided petty bourgeois peasants are incapable of forming an independent political party able to carry through the struggle to the end.)

The working class establishes its own political power and carries out the belated bourgeois

democratic tasks. But these necessarily entail decisive incursions into the rights of private property. The bourgeois-democratic revolution therefore goes over organically into the socialist revolution—hence the name permanent revolution. In his book, *The Permanent Revolution*, in the chapter What is the Permanent Revolution? Basic Postulates, Trotsky expresses this as follows:

"2. With regard to countries with a belated bourgeois development, especially the colonial and semi-colonial countries, the theory of permanent revolution signifies that the complete and genuine solution of their tasks of achieving democracy and national emancipation is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat as the leader of the subjugated nation, above all of its peasant masses.

"3. Not only the agrarian, but also the national question assigns to the peasantry—the overwhelming majority of the population in backward countries—an exceptional place in the democratic revolution. Without an alliance of the proletariat with the peasantry the tasks of the democratic revolution cannot be solved, not even seriously posed. But the alliance of these two classes can be realised in no other way than through an irreconcilable struggle against the national-liberal bourgeoisie. . . .

"4. The dictatorship of the proletariat which has risen to power as the leader of the democratic revolution is inevitably and very quickly confronted with tasks, the fulfilment of which is bound up with deep incursions into the rights of bourgeois property. The democratic revolution grows over directly into the socialist revolution and thereby becomes a permanent revolution."

To sum up—in the period of the rise of capitalism the bourgeoisie rallied the oppressed classes behind it in its struggle against the old order and established the nation-state. In the period of the decline of capitalism, in the backward countries, the achievement of national-democratic tasks is still on the historical agenda but the national bourgeoisie, along with foreign imperialism, is now an obstacle to their realisation. The tasks of national liberation and agrarian reform fall to the proletariat which rallies the oppressed classes of the nation around it and mobilises them against foreign and domestic reaction. It cannot halt at the achievement of purely democratic tasks but is compelled to go over to the realisation of socialist objectives. It is also, of course, obliged to seek bases of support internationally.

### Two-stage theory of revolution

As opposed to the theory of permanent revolution, the Stalinists, following the Russian Mensheviks before them, put forward a "two-stage" theory of revolution in the backward countries. The Mensheviks have their own version of this stage theory. The essence of this theory is that before the "stage" of socialist revolution can come to pass there must be the



"stage" of a "democratic", (ie, capitalist) revolution which would achieve the tasks of national independence, land reform, political democracy, etc. The Stalinist stages theory makes a distinction between a "progressive" section of the national bourgeoisie and the comprador bourgeoisie which is tied to imperialism. In reality, this distinction is false: no section of the colonial and semi-colonial bourgeoisies has any interest in fighting imperialism, or carrying out a thoroughgoing land reform because such actions would, as we have seen, inevitably lead to the overthrow of capitalism in toto. The second "stage" in the Stalinist schema, the struggle of the workers against the capitalists for socialism, is supposed only to take place after an extended period of purely capitalist development. In reality, in no country does this "stage" ever come on the agenda for the Stalinists.

Marxists completely reject the "stages" theory of revolution. The permanent revolution doesn't recognise any "stages." There is a definite task of national liberation in the backward countries but this task is combined inextricably with the proletarian struggle for socialism and is solved along with it by the proletariat in opposition to imperialism and domestic capitalist and semi-feudal reaction.

In the *Transitional Program*, Trotsky explains this as follows:

"Colonial and semi-colonial countries are backward countries by their very essence. But backward countries are part of a world dominated by imperialism. Their development, therefore, has a combined character: the most primitive economic forms are combined with the last word in capitalist technique and culture. In like manner are defined the political strivings of the proletariat of backward countries: the struggle for the most elementary achievements of national independence and bourgeois democracy is combined with the socialist struggle against world imperialism. Democratic slogans, transitional demands and the problems of the socialist revolution are not divided into separate historical epochs in this struggle, but stem directly from one another."

Trotsky goes on following this passage to point out that not only must the working class be armed with the program for the national-democratic revolution to rally the poor peasants behind them, but this program is a weapon against the national bourgeoisie.

"It is impossible," he says, "merely to reject the democratic program; it is imperative that in the struggle the masses outgrow it. The slogan for a National (or Constituent) Assembly preserves its full force for such countries as China or India. This slogan must be indissolubly tied up with the problem of national liberation and agrarian reform. As a primary step, the workers must be armed with this democratic program. Only they will be able to summon and unite the farmers. On the basis of the revolutionary democratic program, it is necessary to oppose the

workers to the 'national' bourgeoisie. Then, at a later stage in the mobilisation of the masses under the slogans of revolutionary democracy, soviets can and should arise."

The existence of the unsolved bourgeois-democratic tasks in the backward countries is a tremendous historical opportunity for the revolutionary working class. The proletariat has to make the solution of these tasks the basis of its revolutionary program. On the basis of such a national program, the relatively small working class of a colonial or semi-colonial country can come to power sooner than the proletariat of an advanced country on a purely socialist program. This is a fundamental lesson of the Russian Revolution.

## National liberation/national independence

At this point we should make absolutely clear the relation between national liberation for backward



Algerian liberation forces in struggle against France. Formal political independence doesn't necessarily mean full national liberation.

countries and formal political independence. A great many former colonies of the imperialist powers have gained formal political independence since the Second World War (in Africa and Asia). Have they thereby achieved national liberation? Have they eliminated, or are they on the road to eliminating, their backwardness and subordination to imperialism?

Just to ask the question in this way is to supply the answer. Irrespective whether we are dealing with an outright colony or a formally independent country, backward countries are backward, their development in all directions is stunted, because they are nationally oppressed, because they are dominated by imperialism which oppresses the whole country and is responsible for blocking the achievement of its bourgeois-democratic tasks. These countries are therefore at a lower level of social and economic development than the imperialist countries and it will take a social and economic revolution to overcome this underdevelopment. In his article, *Imperialist Economics*, A caricature of Marxism, Lenin makes this point: "... the question is, how to eliminate national oppression? It cannot be eliminated without an economic revolution." (*Collected Works*, Vol 23, p 75)

National oppression cannot be ended by a political reform under capitalism, that is, it cannot be ended by the achievement of national self-determination, the achievement of formal political independence alone. The winning of formal independence by a colony is a step forward but unless it is part of a process of permanent revolution whereby the working class allied with the poor peasantry liquidates the agrarian problem and eliminates capitalism thus tearing the country away from imperialism it will not be able to end national oppression and backwardness. Only on the basis of nationalised property, a monopoly of foreign trade and economic planning can the nation build up industry and overcome its underdevelopment.

Formal independence within capitalism does not mean and cannot mean real, genuine independence from imperialism. It is well known that imperialism dominates completely the economies of the nominally independent backward countries, just as much as it does those of the direct colonies. Imperialism also wields immense political power in these countries. Formal independence means little in the face of the tremendous pressure imperialism exerts through bribery, corruption, economic blackmail, and outright force on a vast scale to achieve its end.

Formal independence has likewise nowhere led to the solution of the agrarian problem, the achievement of which is absolutely essential to the overcoming of national backwardness. A good example of the absolute incapacity of the national bourgeoisie to carry out this task in a colony which has achieved independence is provided by the case of Egypt.

Following Nasser's coup in 1952 the new regime carried out a land reform which probably went farther than in any other semicolonial country. But in 1964

Hassan Riad could write in his book *L'Egypte Nasserienne*:

"Despite the agrarian reform, great inequalities remain: 80 per cent of the peasants remain without land or almost without any and only about one-third of their labor power is employed. The political power of the aristocracy, which was formerly based on the intermediate layers, has merely been replaced by that of the state bureaucracy which still bases itself on this relatively privileged minority.

Another observer, Anouar Abdel-Malek, wrote in 1968 in *Egypt: Military Society* that:

"The big proprietors understood that there was never any question of permitting any peasant insurrection whatever, or any revolutionary action by the Left. Then, reassured, they came legitimately to suppose that they would be able to pursue their old kind of life in peace and quiet—apartment houses, luxury goods and export of capital—for the golden age of the great estates of yesterday had returned . . ."

This example, and there are many others, shows that land reform without expropriating capitalist private property is not possible in the backward countries. The only countries that have managed to solve the agrarian problem in the imperialist epoch are those which have taken the road of socialist revolution—Russia, China, Cuba, etc.

## Imperialist nationalism

When talking about nationalism in the imperialist epoch we have to make a basic distinction corresponding to the distinction we make between oppressor and oppressed nations. We distinguish between the nationalism of the oppressor nation and the nationalism of the oppressed nation. We oppose the former and support the latter.

In the period of the rise of capitalism nationalism is generally progressive because it corresponds to the struggle for objectives which are of progressive significance for humanity as a whole. But as the bourgeoisie establishes its political and economic power the progressive character of this ideology diminishes. It no longer acts as a force mobilising the people of the nation for struggle against the pre-capitalist social order but instead becomes nothing but a cover for the reactionary aims of the imperialist bourgeoisie. Nationalism was a great force, for example, in the struggle of the French revolution against the old feudal regime and its European allies in the eighteenth century. But the nationalism of the French ruling class in this century is totally reactionary. It has been a means of dragging the French workers, against their own class interest, into inter-imperialist wars and the colonial oppression of other peoples in the interests of French imperialism. There are no great tasks confronting the French nation as a whole anymore. On the agenda in France today is the class struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie



to achieve socialism. French nationalism is a weapon of the ruling class that the workers will have to overcome on their way.

Of course, there were always negative aspects to bourgeois nationalism even when it was the standard bearer of a great historical cause. As George Novack explains in *Democracy and Revolution*:

"Almost from birth the best of bourgeois nationalisms were disfigured by obnoxious features which in time tainted their worthier accomplishments. By making submission to the dictates of the regime the prime test of good citizenship, patriotism was a powerful sentiment in the hands of the classes in control of the state apparatus, to abuse as they pleased. Through the gospel of 'my country, right or wrong', progressive patriotism and revolutionary nationalism could pass over into reactionary chauvinism, which justified abominable crimes in the name of defending the fatherland." (p 113)

With the establishment of capitalism on a world scale, these and other reactionary features of bourgeois nationalism have become its only content. Marxists oppose the nationalism of imperialist powers because there is no longer any common interest that the working class has with its bourgeoisie. The historical task right now is the abolition of capitalism through the expropriation of the bourgeoisie.

### Nationalism in oppressed nations

We appraise completely differently the nationalism of oppressed nations. Countries like India, Brazil or Egypt are all nationally oppressed by imperialism and have yet to achieve their bourgeois-democratic revolutions. In so far as their nationalism promotes the struggle for the achievement of these tasks historically connected with the bourgeois-democratic revolution—the agrarian question, national unity, national independence—it is progressive and we support it. One of the clearest statements on the nationalism of the oppressed made by Trotsky is in his 1930 letter to the Indochinese Oppositionists. The following section is worth quoting in full.

"4. On page four there is the statement that nationalism, 'which at all times has been a reactionary ideology, can only forge new chains for the working class.' Here nationalism is taken abstractly as a transcendent supranational idea that always remains reactionary. This is neither a historical nor a dialectical way of posing the question, and it opens the door for incorrect conclusions. Nationalism has not always been a reactionary ideology, not by far, and it is not always one today either. Can one say, for example that the nationalism of the Great French Revolution was a reactionary force in the struggle against feudal Europe? By no means. Even the nationalism of the late-arriving and cowardly German bourgeoisie in the period from 1848 to 1870 (the struggle for national unification) represented a progressive force against

Bonapartism.

"At the present time the nationalism of the most backward Indochinese peasant, directed against French imperialism, is a revolutionary element as opposed to the abstract and false cosmopolitanism of the Freemasons and other democratic bourgeois types, or the "internationalism" of the Social Democrats, who help to rob the Indochinese peasant.

"The declaration states quite correctly that the nationalism of the bourgeoisie is a means for subordinating and deceiving the masses. But the nationalism of the mass of the people is the elementary form taken by their just and progressive hatred for the

**"With the establishment of capitalism on a world scale . . . reactionary features of bourgeois nationalism have become its only content."**

most skilled, capable, and ruthless of their oppressors, that is, the foreign imperialists. The proletariat does not have the right to turn its back on *this kind* of nationalism. On the contrary, it must demonstrate in practice that it is the most consistent and devoted fighter for the national liberation of Indochina." (*Writings of Leon Trotsky (1930-31)*)

The struggle against national oppression by an oppressed people and the nationalist consciousness that is generated in this process is tremendously progressive. The struggle for national liberation leads to a great moral and political awakening by people crushed by imperialism. Just as the great bourgeois revolutions of an earlier era mobilised the popular masses for struggle and drew them into a wider political and cultural life, so the struggle for national emancipation can arouse the oppressed classes of a subjugated nation. We have seen a great many instances of such an awakening in the postwar period. The Vietnamese and Palestinian struggles are cases in point.

It should be pointed out, however, that not all demands raised by an oppressed people are progressive under all circumstances. Only those national slogans and demands aimed at the achievement of freedom from imperialism and the solution of genuine national problems are progressive and can be supported by Marxists. For instance, Arab nationalism is progressive when it is directed against Israel and imperialism, the oppressors of the Arab peoples. However, when Arab nationalism is directed against the oppressed Kurdish people it is reactionary. Anti-Kurdish sentiment in Arab nationalism expresses, not the real interests of the broad Arab masses, but the narrow interests of the Arab ruling classes and imperialism. We can also give no support to slogans connected to religion.

While, as this example shows, the ruling classes in

oppressed nations may attempt to use nationalism to serve their own interests, we can't on this account conclude that the nationalism of the oppressed is also bourgeois ideology. As we have seen, in our historical period the struggle of oppressed nations and backward countries for the achievement of belated bourgeois-democratic tasks is inextricably combined with the struggle for the achievement of socialist tasks by the proletariat. The nationalism of the oppressed in the imperialist epoch tends to merge with the socialist, the internationalist consciousness of the working class, not bourgeois ideology.

### Right of nations to self-determination—the Marxist view

The development of imperialism, as we noted earlier, has led to the division of the world into a handful of oppressor nations and a large number of oppressed nations. (We put aside for the moment the question of the post-capitalist world.) National oppression is all-pervasive in the capitalist world. One of the most basic forms of national oppression is the forcible retention of one nation within the national state of another nation. Hence our whole series of national demands is centred around the right of oppressed nations to self-determination, that is, to form a separate state if they so wish, even though we realise that such a reform alone cannot end national oppression; only a social revolution can do that. Before we go on to consider this in detail, some definitions are in order.

What is a nation? The classical Marxist definition of a nation was provided by Joseph Stalin in his 1913 work *Marxism and the National Question*. Stalin's work is completely at variance with his well-known practice on the national question both before and after the degeneration of the Bolshevik Party. The work itself is totally unlike anything else Stalin ever wrote. In his book *Stalin*, Trotsky explains this mystery as follows:

"*Marxism and the National Question* is undoubtedly Stalin's most important—rather, his one and only—theoretical work. On the basis of that single article, which was forty printed pages long, its author is entitled to recognition as an outstanding theoretician. What is rather mystifying is why he did not write anything else of even remotely comparable quality either before or after. The key to the mystery is hidden away in this, that Stalin's work was wholly inspired by Lenin, written under his unremitting supervision and edited by him line by line." (p233)

Stalin's definition of a nation is: "A nation is a historically-constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture."

This definition and Stalin's (Lenin's) book followed a long period of debate and clarification on the

national question. Lenin and the Russian Marxists had defended their analysis and program on the national question against revolutionaries like Rosa Luxemburg who mistakenly denied the right of oppressed nations to self-determination, and against reformists like the Austro-Marxist Otto Bauer who put forward the theory of "cultural national autonomy." As Trotsky explains in *Stalin*, "the Austrian Social-Democracy, in the persons of Otto Bauer and Karl Renner, considered nationality independent of territory, economy and class, transforming it into a species of abstraction limited by so-called 'national character.'" (p 227)

This non-materialist theory of nationality underlay their program of cultural national autonomy which was designed to appease the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois nationalists of the multi-national Austro-Hungarian Empire but to avoid in any dismembering the state and disturbing the dominance of the Hapsburg monarchy and the Austrian and Hungarian ruling classes.

"Lenin's position," writes Trotsky, "was the direct opposite. Regarding nationality as unseverably connected with territory, economy and class structure, he refused at the same time to regard the historical state, the borders of which cut across the living body of nations, as a sacrosanct and inviolate category."

Stalin's definition of a nation, relating it to the material conditions of its existence, is very fruitful because it means that the solution to national oppression must lie with changing those material conditions, beginning with territory. Marxists as Trotsky put it, are not addicted to "the fetishistic worship of a state's borders."

It is also useful to define a nationality as distinct from a nation. The term nationality is generally used to refer to the population of a nation. But more precisely we can define a nationality as a grouping with all the attributes of a nation but lacking a common territory and economy. That is, to adopt Stalin's definition of a nation, a nationality is "a historically

Imperialist nationalism helped drive masses to World War I slaughter.





constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture." Marxists support the right to self-determination of oppressed nationalities too.

The Black people in the United States, for instance, are an oppressed nationality having been welded together on the basis of long common oppression but being dispersed throughout the US territory and economy. The Quebecois in Canada, on the other hand, are an oppressed nation. They have a common territory and economy and the attributes of nationality. This distinction can be useful in discussing national oppression because the national struggles of the two types of national formations, while basically similar, can have important differences.

### Pervasiveness of national oppression

To return to the original point, national oppression is truly ubiquitous in the capitalist world (I'll say something about the non-capitalist world later). And one of the most common forms of national oppression is the forcible retention of one nation within the state boundaries of another nation in a condition of servitude, that is, the denial of its right to determine its own future.

Many colonies have achieved their formal independence in the post-war period but there are still many examples of direct colonial oppression in the world today. Puerto Rico is a direct colony of the United States. Namibia (South West Africa) is a colony of South Africa. Then there are the settler-

colonial regimes. In Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) and South Africa itself, the indigenous people are nationally oppressed by colonialists who have actually settled in these countries. In Palestine (Israel) the settler-colonialists have forcibly expelled the indigenous people outside the state borders of their homeland and that is the basis of the oppression of the Palestinians.

Most of the formally independent semi-colonial countries are nationally very heterogeneous, that is, they are multinational states. The case of India illustrates this very well. The Eighth Schedule to the constitution of India lists 15 major languages spoken in India. But even this doesn't give an accurate idea of the immense national diversity of India. The 1961 census listed 1652 mother tongues in India of which only 103 are non-Indian!

Often, in these countries the dominant nation oppresses other nations within its state frontiers. Iran, for instance is a multinational state. While all the people of Iran are oppressed by imperialism, the dominant Persian nation (only 40 per cent of the population) nationally oppresses the Azerbaijanis, Kurds, Arabs and Baluchis. Persian is the official language of the country and the Shah's regime does not allow the other national groupings to teach their language in their schools. These oppressed nations are denied self-determination and their cultural and economic development is stifled.

Contiguous to Iran is Iraq, a predominantly-Arab country. The Iraqi Arabs nationally oppress the non-Arab Kurdish national minority, some 25 per cent of the total population of Iraq. In Latin America, the original Indian tribes and peoples are ruthlessly oppressed in countries like Brazil and Chile. In

Ethiopia, the Eritreans are nationally oppressed by the dominant nation. The struggles for national self-determination by oppressed peoples in the semi-colonial countries have a proven anti-imperialist and revolutionary potential.

Although the imperialist countries tend to be relatively highly nationally homogeneous, significant national oppression exists within the borders of the metropolitan countries themselves. In the United States, the Black and Chicano nationalities are oppressed along with the Puerto Rican national minority and the native American nationality. In Canada, the Quebecois nation is oppressed by the English-Canadian majority. In Australia, the Black people are nationally oppressed. In Spain, the Basque and Catalan peoples are oppressed. The national struggle of even a small oppressed minority within an imperialist country can have a great catalytic effect on the overall class struggle in these countries.

The Marxist position in these cases of national oppression is to support the right of the oppressed nation or nationality to self-determination, up to and including the right to secede from the state of the oppressor nation. However, we defend the right and don't necessarily advocate one particular course as against another unless it is clear that this is what the majority of the oppressed desires. The national demands of oppressed nations on the state level can vary greatly. For example, the Quebecois, Puerto Rican and Basque peoples are fighting for independence from their oppressor nations, and their states. The Kurds in Iraq are fighting for autonomy within Iraq. The Palestinians are demanding a unitary state with their oppressors, the Israeli Jews. The Irish people are fighting for the unification of their country. The Blacks in the United States are fighting for equal rights in all spheres of life and control of their own communities. Each of these demands is a concrete specification of what self-determination means for the oppressed people.

### Marx and Engels on Ireland

I now want to consider the development of the Marxist position on the national question and the right of nations to self-determination. A good place to start is to look at Marx's views on the Irish question and how they developed. These are very clearly set out in his various letters on Ireland. These are collected in the book *The First International and After* (published by Penguin).

Ireland had been colonised by England for centuries and since 1801 had been forcibly incorporated in a union with England. Marx first believed that Ireland would not be freed by the national movement of the oppressed Irish people themselves but by the revolutionary movement of the working class in the oppressor country. But the English workers movement came under the influence of the bourgeois

liberals for a long period and became politically helpless. In the meantime the ruthless exactions of the English had stimulated the bourgeois national liberation movement in Ireland which assumed revolutionary forms. Marx's views underwent a change. In a letter to Engels on November 2, 1867, he says:

"... I used to regard Ireland's separation from England as impossible. I now think it inevitable, although federation may follow separation." (p 158)

And in a letter to Engels a while later (November 30, 1867) Marx writes:

"The question now is what advice we should give the English workers? In my view they must make *Repeal of the Union* (in short, the *arrangement of 1783*, but democratised and adapted to the times) an article of their *pronunciamento*. This is the only legal and hence the only possible form of Irish emancipation which can be included in the program of an English party. Experience must show later whether a mere personal union between the two countries could continue. . .

"What the Irish need are:

"1. Self-government and independence from England.

"2. Agrarian revolution." (p 161)

**"Marx very clearly understood that workers who support national oppression by their own ruling class . . . cannot wage a struggle for their own emancipation."**

Thus Marx, with the rise of an Irish national movement, came to advocate the separation of Ireland from England, although he held out the possibility that sometime in the future Ireland might wish to freely federate with England. Marx realised that the national oppression of the Irish by the English was also holding back the class struggle of the English workers against their ruling class. The cultivation of anti-Irish prejudices in the English workers was making them into tools of their own ruling class. Marx explains this in a letter to Meyer and Vogt.

"... All English industrial and commercial centres now possess a working class *split* and two *hostile* camps: English proletarians and Irish proletarians. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker because he sees in him a competitor who lowers his standard of life. Compared with the Irish worker he feels himself a member of the *ruling nation* and for this very reason he makes himself into a tool of the aristocrats and capitalists *against Ireland* and thus strengthens their domination *over himself*. He cherishes religious, social and national prejudices against the Irish worker. His attitude is much the same as that of the 'poor whites' towards the 'niggers' in the former slave states of the American Union." (p 169)

British troops help evict Irish peasants (1890).





Marx emphasises what this means for the English workers.

"... quite apart from all the 'international' and 'humane' phrases about justice-for-Ireland... it is in the direct and absolute interests of the English working class to get rid of their present connection with Ireland... I long believed it was possible to overthrow the Irish regime by way of English working-class ascendancy. This is the position I always represented in the *New York Tribune*. A deeper study has now convinced me of the opposite. The English working class will never achieve anything before it has got rid of Ireland. The lever must be applied in Ireland. That is why the Irish question is so important for the social movement in general..." (p. 167)

These statements of Marx contain so many clear prescriptions for the policy of the working class on the national question. Marx very clearly understood that workers who support national oppression by their own ruling class are in a bloc with them and cannot wage a struggle for their own emancipation. The condition of the working class of an oppressor nation being able to effectively defend its own interests is that it must first break with its ruling class and actively support the struggle of the oppressed nation. The working class of the oppressor nation must support the right of the oppressed nation to determine its own future even up to the point of political separation, ie secession.

Commenting on the policy of Marx and Engels on the Irish question in his 1914 work, *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, Lenin said that it "serves as a splendid example of the attitude the proletariat of the oppressor nations should adopt towards national movements, an example which has lost none of its immense practical importance." (CW, vol 20, p. 442)

## Bolsheviks'

In Eastern Europe and Asia the period of bourgeois-democratic revolutions did not begin until 1905. The national question was particularly acute in Eastern Europe where a whole series of national movements arose in the first part of the 20th century. The question of the national program of the proletariat acquired a very great importance. The Bolsheviks formulated and defended their program over many years and in the course of numerous debates with people like Rosa Luxemburg on the one hand, and the Austro-Marxists like Bauer and Renner on the other. The Bolshevik program on the national question comprised several key propositions. (These are elaborated succinctly in Lenin's theses on *The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, which he wrote in 1916. His main work polemicalising with Rosa Luxemburg is *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination* written in 1914.)

The proletariat will be unable to prepare for victory over the bourgeoisie, said Lenin, "unless it wages a

many-sided, consistent and revolutionary struggle for democracy." (CW, vol 22, p. 144) A key democratic demand and a fundamental plank of the Bolsheviks' national program is the right of oppressed nations to self-determination. This demand is absolutely essential to winning the political confidence of the masses of the oppressed nationalities and drawing them behind the struggle for socialism. In his 1916 theses Lenin explains precisely what this demand means: "The right of nations to self-determination means only the right to independence in a political sense, the right to free, political secession from the oppressing nation. Concretely this political, democratic demand implies complete freedom to carry on agitation in favor of secession, and freedom to settle the question of secession by means of a referendum of the nation that desires to secede." (CW, vol 22, p. 246)

The unconditional championing of the democratic demand of self-determination had to be the policy of the revolutionary party in the oppressor nation before, during and after the socialist revolution. It must prove in action to the oppressed nationalities that only the struggle for socialism can end all national oppression. (On the other hand, the revolutionary party in the oppressed nation which supported and fought as part of the nationalist struggle for self-determination was under the obligation to stress the internationalist and socialist demands in order to win over the masses of the oppressed nation to socialism.)

Support for the right to self-determination does not imply any support for the national bourgeoisie of an oppressed nation except, as Lenin explains in *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, the "bourgeois nationalism of any oppressed nation has a general democratic content that is directed against oppression, and it is this content that we unconditionally support." (CW, vol 20, p. 412) As the theory of permanent revolution teaches us, only the working class and its allies can lead the struggle to completion. The oppressed masses can never rely on its national bourgeoisie which can only betray the struggle due to its class interests and links to imperialism.

Support for the right of nations to self-determination does not mean we are advocates of secession or separation. We only defend the right of the oppressed nation to decide its own destiny without being oppressed by anyone. What it decides to do will depend on the concrete circumstances. The revolutionary party will help it realise its national will.

Socialism aims to end all national antagonisms and end the present national division of humanity by eventually merging the nations together. But in order to mobilise the masses for revolution it is necessary to raise national slogans, and in order to achieve a voluntary union of nations after the socialist revolution it is necessary that they should have the right to withdraw, ie, secede.

As Lenin explains "Just as mankind can achieve the



Soldiers and sailors in Petrograd, 1917. Bolsheviks supported national rights of all peoples oppressed by Russian empire.

abolition of classes only by passing through the transition period of the dictatorship of the oppressed class, so mankind can achieve the inevitable merging of nations only by passing through the transition period of complete liberation of all the oppressed nations, ie, their freedom to secede." (CW, vol 22, p. 147)

Rosa Luxemburg argued that the demand for self-determination cannot be achieved under capitalism. However, Lenin pointed out, this argument is refuted by the fact that Norway seceded from Sweden in 1905, and with the support of the Swedish workers. Also, "not only the right of nations to self-determination, but all the fundamental demands of political democracy are only partially 'practicable' under imperialism, and then in a distorted form and by way of exception." (CW, vol 20, p. 145) Also, any democratic demand could serve under certain circumstances, as an instrument of the bourgeoisie for duping the workers. But this doesn't free socialists from the obligation to struggle for democratic demands, to expose the deceptions of the bourgeoisie and to show the masses in action that only the socialist revolution will fully realise all the basic democratic rights proclaimed by the bourgeoisie, including the right to national self-determination.

## The multi-national revolutionary party

Dialectically related to this demand for the right of oppressed nations to self-determination was another aspect of the policy of the Bolsheviks in the national sphere. In his *History of the Russian Revolution* (Volume 3, p. 41) Trotsky explains this as follows:

"Within the framework of the party, and of the workers organisations in general, Bolshevism insisted upon a rigid centralism, implacably warring against every taint of nationalism which might set the workers one against the other or disunite them. While flatly refusing to the bourgeois states the right to impose compulsory citizenship, or even a state language, upon a national minority, Bolshevism at the same time made it a very sacred task to unite as closely as possible, by means of voluntary class discipline, the workers of different nationalities. Thus it flatly rejected the national-federation principle in building the party. A revolutionary organisation is not the prototype of the future state, but merely the instrument of its creation. An instrument ought to be adapted to fashioning the product; it ought not to include the product. Thus a centralised organisation can guarantee the success of revolutionary struggle—even where the task is to destroy the centralised oppression of nationalities."

The Bolshevik policy, of the unification of revolutionary workers of all nationalities, of the oppressor and oppressed nations, within the territory of the oppressor state in the revolutionary party on the basis of democratic centralism was opposed by the Jewish Bund. The Bund demanded that it be regarded as the sole representative of all the Jewish workers living in Russia. It wanted the division of workers by nationality, not by territory, and their right to have separate national parties. The Bund split from the Russian Social-Democracy at its Second Congress in 1903 over this issue. The Jewish workers were dispersed all over Russia and it was more logical for them to join the party organisation of the Social Democracy in their area. The Bund's policy, if followed by the Russian Marxists, would only have led to the fragmentation of the revolutionary forces. The nature of the revolutionary party is determined by the centralised nature of the state power it is fighting against, in this case the despotic Czarist regime. The revolutionary party can't be replaced by a federation of national parties within a given state; it must be centralised also. Of course, the Russian Social Democrats accepted the need for special propaganda in the native language of the Jewish workers and so on.

## National question in the Russian Revolution

The Bolshevik policy on the national question was tested to the full in the struggle leading up to the



1917 October Revolution and afterwards. The successful outcome of the revolution could not have been obtained without a correct policy in this sphere. Russia was not a national state but a heterogeneous state comprising many nationalities. Russian commercial capitalism developed not by transforming production but by expanding outwards and incorporating new areas into its radius of operation. Russia became an immense prison house of nations. There were literally scores of nationalities oppressed in the Czarist empire. There were 70 million Great Russians, the dominant, oppressor nationality, and some 90 million "outlanders." The Great Russians comprised only 43 per cent of the population. The non-Russian 57 per cent included Ukrainians (17 per cent), Poles (6 per cent) and White Russians (4½ per cent). National oppression in the Russian empire was much harsher than in the surrounding countries due to the primitive economy of the country and despotic demands of the regime. (There are two excellent articles in the April 5 and April 12, 1976, issues of *Intercontinental Press* on The Struggle of Soviet Jews by David Frankel. They give a vivid and horrifying picture of the national oppression of Jews under the Czarist regime. By the end of 1887 the Czarist legal code contained 650 exceptional laws specifically discriminating against Jews! The oppression of the Jews got worse right up to 1917. The Jews served as very useful scapegoats for the autocracy.)

The Provisional Government that issued out of the February revolution in 1917 did very little to fundamentally alter the conditions of national oppression in the Russian state. It annulled all exceptional laws and gave people of all nationalities formal equality before the law but it was opposed to anything which would dismember the territory of the Russian state. It came up with new arguments to support the retention of the oppressed nationalities within Russia: that the unity of the revolution and the needs of Russia's participation in the war (to which they were committed) demanded it.

However, the granting of equal rights before the law didn't satisfy the oppressed nationalities. Finland, for instance, wanted independence, not equality. Legal equality didn't help the Lettish and Estonian peasants oppressed by German landlords and the German-Russian cities. It didn't solve the national oppression of the Ukrainian masses. But the formal democratic rights granted by the Provisional government made the oppressed peoples more aware of their own lack of means of cultural development: their own schools, their own courts, their own officials.

In the borderlands of the Russian state the national character of the cities was completely different to that of the countryside. "In the Ukraine and White Russia," explains Trotsky in *The History of the Russian Revolution*, "the landlord, capitalist, lawyer, journalist, was a Great Russian, a Pole, a Jew, a foreigner; the rural population was wholly Ukrainian and White Russian." (Vol 3, p. 41)

In her 1918 prison article on the Russian Revolution Rosa Luxemburg, a long-time opponent of the national policy of the Bolsheviks, dismissed Ukrainian nationalism as nothing but an "amusement" of the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia and said that the Bolsheviks' policy had artificially inflated its importance. Trotsky takes her up on this point in his history. He points out that "The Ukrainian peasantry had not made national demands in the past for the reason that the Ukrainian peasantry had not in general risen to the height of political being. The chief service of the February revolution—perhaps its only service, but one amply sufficient—lay exactly in this, that it gave the oppressed classes and nations of Russia at last an opportunity to speak out. This political awakening of the peasantry could not have taken place otherwise, however, than through their own native language—with all the consequences ensuing in regard to schools, courts, self-administration. To oppose this would have been to try to drive the peasants back into non-existence." (p. 47)

The oppressed nationalities gradually lost faith in the ability of the Provisional Government to help them in any real way and came to put their faith in their own independent action. In order to liberate themselves the oppressed nationalities were obliged to join their fate with that of the working class. And in order to do this they had to free themselves of the influence of their own bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. In Russia's three revolutions, Trotsky points out, there is no case of the bourgeoisie of an oppressed nation playing a liberating role in relation to its own people. Essentially each bourgeoisie acted as agents of the Great Russian bourgeoisie just as it in turn acted as the agent of international capitalism.

The national movements didn't come over to the proletarian revolution all at once but only through a lengthy process. In the case of Finland, Latvia and Estonia the class division of the national movement had become so deep by October that only the intervention of German troops could crush the socialist revolution there. On the other hand, in some of the Asian regions of Russia it was only after the October revolution that the oppressed peoples came under the influence of the socialist revolution as their national consciousness awakened. But, considering the situation as a whole, writes Trotsky, "the national current, like the agrarian, was pouring into the channel of the October revolution." "... the national movements of Russia became stepping stones to the Soviet dictatorship." (p. 56)

The Russian October revolution shows the explosive revolutionary potential the national liberation movements of oppressed peoples can have. With the correct policy of the revolutionary party these movements can become powerful allies of the socialist revolution. This is because, in the twentieth century, only the working class can achieve the task of national emancipation as part of its struggle for socialism.

The national policy of the Bolshevik party went by



the board in the Soviet Union with the Stalinist degeneration of the party and the state, and consequently, national oppression still exists there. I won't go into this here but later on I'll look briefly at the role of the national question in the political revolution in the bureaucratised workers states.

## National struggles in the imperialist countries

In recent years there has been a rise of national struggles in the imperialist countries themselves. The Blacks in the United States, the Quebecois in Canada, the Basques in France and Spain, the Koreans in Japan and the Irish have all waged struggles against their national oppression. So have the relatively small populations of Aborigines in Australia, Maoris in New Zealand, Native Americans in the United States and Lapps in Norway and Sweden. And this is by no means a complete list. The crisis of imperialism has intensified national oppression in the metropolitan countries and has also given an impetus to the growth of national consciousness in peoples whose national identity was sometimes thought to have been forever extinguished by the rise of capitalism.

The national question in the imperialist centres consists of the fact that these oppressed nationalities have been denied completion of their bourgeois-democratic revolutions. The great bourgeois revolutions which established the major capitalist countries were achieved by the dominant nationality only. The bourgeois-democratic revolution in the United States, for example, was completed for the white Americans in the Civil War. But the American Blacks have been denied their national revolution. Nor have they been allowed incorporation into the dominant nationality. American capitalism needs the oppressed Black-pariah nationality for the extraction of super-profits and for politically maintaining its rule

by the fostering of racism.

The existence of the national question means that the proletarian revolution in these countries will be a combined revolution: the struggle of the oppressed nationalities for self-determination will be combined with the struggle of the proletariat for socialism. The theory of permanent revolution applies here with full force. These nationalities are oppressed by imperialism in its very heartland. Only the working class leading the struggle for socialism will be able to solve their uncompleted national democratic tasks. The very high proletarian composition of many of the oppressed peoples in the imperialist countries means that the links between the national and socialist struggles will be made more easily and will be much stronger and the leadership role of the working class will be more easily established than in the backward countries.

The case of the national question in the United States is of great interest. This is in part because of the very great weight it has in the coming American revolution. But the United States is also very interesting for what it shows of the way imperialism can create new nationalities. The Black people in the United States originated in a different way to most of the nationalities that the Marxist movement had discussed. They were dragged to America as slaves. They came from completely different nations and tribes and from different parts of Africa. They spoke different languages and had different cultures. They acquired a common identity through the destruction of their native cultures and languages and the experience of a common oppression. They were separated out on the basis of their skin-color due to the needs of American capitalism. They lack a common territory or a separate language of their own but they have become a nationality nevertheless because of their consciousness of their common oppressed condition.

Australian Blacks  
National question  
has growing  
weight in imper-  
ialist countries.



In discussion with the United States Trotskyists in the 1930s Trotsky explained that the Black struggle for self-determination was a process of permanent revolution. He said that "the self-determination" of the Negroes belong to the question of the permanent revolution in America. The Negroes will through their awakening, through their demand for autonomy, and through the democratic mobilisation of their forces, be pushed on toward the class basis. The petty bourgeoisie will take up the demand for 'social, political, and economic equality' and for 'self-determination' but will prove absolutely incapable in the struggle; the Negro proletariat will march over the petty bourgeoisie in the direction toward the proletarian revolution." (*Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism and Self-Determination*, p 14)

The struggles of the Blacks in the United States and of other oppressed nationalities in the imperialist countries are extremely important for the class struggle. Even where these peoples are very small minorities (the Basques, for instance, make up only 5 per cent of the population of Spain and the Aborigines are an even smaller fraction of the Australian population) their struggles can have a very great effect on the overall class struggle, stimulating and enriching it.

### National question in the bureaucratized workers states

Today's world, as we all know, is not all capitalist. About one third of the world's people live in post-capitalist societies. Almost all of these are bureaucratized workers states, states with the property forms appropriate to a healthy workers state in the period of transition from capitalism to socialism, but lacking a political superstructure of genuine socialist democracy. Just as social antagonisms in general in these countries have not withered away, neither has national oppression. In fact, the bureaucratic regime in the Soviet Union has turned the Soviet Union into a new prison house of nations. It also nationally oppresses the countries of Eastern Europe, themselves bureaucratized workers states.

The Stalinists have completely revised the program and practice of the Bolshevik Party of Lenin and Trotsky on the national question. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics that was set up after the October revolution and the Civil War was based on full recognition of the national rights of the various peoples, up to and including the right of secession. Great progress was registered despite the isolated situation of the Soviet Union in overcoming national oppression and antagonism. Whole peoples only awoke to national and political life after the revolution. The Stalinists trampled on this policy. Advocacy of secession in the Soviet Union of Stalin (or of Brezhnev today) meant a term in the prison camps or worse. During the Second World War, whole peoples were "suspect" and deported from their

homelands (Crimean Tartars, Volga Germans). Antisemitism flourished as it still does—comrades can read about this in David Frankel's article in the April 12, 1976 *Intercontinental Press*.

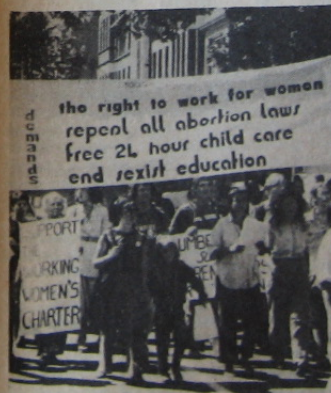
In the rise of internal opposition to the Stalinist regime that we have witnessed over the last decade, a prominent role has been played by representatives of the various oppressed nationalities. Ukrainians such as Ivan Dzyuba have protested the campaign of Russification of the Ukraine carried out by the Stalinist Great Russian chauvinists. The deported Volga Germans are beginning to campaign for the right to return to their homeland and establish their own autonomous republic. And so on.

The question of the national movement in the Soviet Ukraine is very important. The Ukraine is an industrialized nation of some 47 million people. There is strong resentment there at the suppression of Ukrainian culture and the Russification of the country. One of the reasons why the Kremlin invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968 was the fear that its example might spread, particularly to the Ukraine, including the example of the changing relations between the Czechs and Slovaks. The Ukraine has a common border with Czechoslovakia and there is a sizeable Ukrainian population in Czechoslovakia itself. In 1939 Trotsky first proposed the slogan For an Independent Soviet Ukraine and this was adopted by the Fourth International. As Trotsky explained, "The barb of the slogan of an independent Ukraine is aimed directly against the Moscow bureaucracy and enables the proletarian vanguard to rally the peasant masses." (*Writings 1939-40*, first edition, p 76) The struggle for an independent Soviet Ukraine will be an important part of the political revolution in the Soviet Union. Revolutionists must champion the rights of the oppressed Soviet nationalities, up to and including the right of secession. Only in this way can the urge for national emancipation be joined inseparably with the political revolution for socialist democracy.

The national element will also play a very big role in the antibureaucratic struggle in Eastern Europe. Every antibureaucratic uprising in Eastern Europe has had not only to confront the forces of the local regimes but also the military intervention of the Kremlin. The powerful 1953 uprising of the East German workers was only halted by the introduction of 300,000 Soviet troops. The 1968 "Prague Spring" was also crushed by a massive invasion of Kremlin troops. National oppression also manifests itself in the subordination of the economic plans of the East European workers states to Soviet needs. Hence, the political revolution in these countries will be at the same time a national uprising against Kremlin domination and a struggle for socialist democracy against the local bureaucracy.

# The Role of Women's Liberation in the Socialist Revolution

By Mary-Alice Waters



In 1844 Flora Tristan was on an organising tour in provincial France to promote the idea of an international association of workers. Harassed and exhausted, she fell ill and died. Her name became a legend in the French working class.

A short time before her death, she summed up her fate in a letter to one of her friends and comrades. She wrote, "I have nearly the whole world against me. Men because I demand the emancipation of women, the owners because I demand the emancipation of wage-earners."

Seven years later, at a women's rights convention in Akron, Ohio, the former slave Isabella—who is known to history as Sojourner Truth—took the floor to answer a preacher who had ridiculed women as weak and helpless and therefore undeserving of the right to vote. In a stirring speech that turned the entire convention around, Sojourner Truth declared:

"The man over there says women need to be helped into carriages and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages or over puddles, or gives me the best place—and ain't I a woman? Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted and gathered into barns, and no man could head me—and ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman?"

Between those two events came the historic year of 1848. This was the year that women gathered in Seneca Falls, New York, to adopt their own declaration of independence and to launch a conscious, organised movement of women against their oppression as women.

It was also the year that the *Communist Manifesto* was published, proclaiming before the world the birth of scientific socialism. This marked the beginning of the working-class movement as a self-conscious, political movement of the majority of humanity in the interests of the majority.

This coincidence of dates is no real coincidence at all. It reflects the fact that both the proletarian socialist movement and the feminist movement came onto the historical stage with the rise of industrial capitalism. Both were generated by the changes that capitalism brought in the social relations of production and of reproduction, the twin pillars of all human societies.

This is a good point of departure for dealing with the role of women's liberation in the socialist revolution. Of course the oppression of women did not begin with capitalism; to the contrary, it extends back to the dawn of recorded history. But it was the advent of capitalism, with its continuous, revolutionary transformations of humanity's productive capacities beginning with the industrial revolution, that radically



transformed the conditions of life for millions of women. In fact, the capitalist system began to create the material conditions that made women's liberation a realisable goal. It, like socialist revolution, was no longer merely a utopian daydream.

Women's liberation became a goal that was in harmony with the future, not the past, of humanity. And it became a goal around which millions of women and men could be mobilised in struggle.

Just as capitalism itself organised the working class as a whole—increasing its size and concentration, skill, educational level, and political consciousness—so too capitalism transformed the conditions of life and the consciousness of women. It brought millions of women out of the countryside, out of the home, and into the industrial labor force. It began the process of socialising the chores of the individual family—"women's work"—such as baking, weaving, and clothesmaking. New social and political horizons were opened for women.

For the first time since the dawn of civilisation, not only did masses of women begin to become conscious of their oppression, but, more importantly, they began to see a way to end that oppression. They began to raise demands, formulate a program, and organise themselves for struggle.

### The revolt of bourgeois women

The rise and consolidation of capitalism meant different things to women according to their social status. The conditions it created for the wives and daughters of the wealthy were far different from the life of a working-class woman.

The growth of trade, manufacture, and industrial production created a growing layer of wealthy farmers, merchants, and prosperous craftsmen who over time became the owners of prosperous businesses, factories, and mines employing hundreds and sometimes thousands of workers. The women of this developing bourgeoisie found themselves in a curious situation. When they were less wealthy most of them would have worked alongside their men for a good part of the day (in addition to their domestic chores, of course). They would have helped in managing the farm, running the store, working in the printshop or brewery—that is, they were engaged in productive labor outside of domestic chores.

But for the new capitalist ruling class—who in this simply aped the nobility and other ruling classes before them—the mark of status and wealth, even more than the man of leisure, was the woman of leisure. The rise of capitalism extended the number of women who were denied



Arrest of Emmeline Pankhurst, British suffragist leader.

a productive role outside the home and imprisoned in domestic isolation, however privileged they might be. These women, who had both the time and the wealth to educate themselves and expand their intellectual capacities, found their access to education extremely limited. A scholarly, knowledgeable woman was looked on as undesirable, abnormal, unfeminine. Instead, women were supposed to learn "the social graces." The result was the familiar caricature of the pale, fainting, silly Victorian woman.

The denial of the right to an equal education was, in fact, the most flagrant and crippling discrimination that these women faced. An education could have opened the doors to the professions and to the possibility of economic independence.

These women of property saw most clearly the hypocrisy of the refusal of the men of their class to extend to them the rights proclaimed by the bourgeois democratic revolution. They demanded that the legal concept of "person"—as used, for example, in the United States Constitution—be extended to include women. The identification of the struggle for women's rights with the extension of the bourgeois democratic revolution was graphically illustrated in the Declaration of Principles adopted by the Seneca Falls women's rights convention. This document was paragraph for paragraph, line for line, a paraphrase of the United States Declaration of Independence.

Thus, as soon as the prospect of education and economic independence became realistic, the women of the new upper-middle and ruling class began to fight for it. They gained ready allies in the young socialist movement, where all but the most obtuse and bigoted could see that any rights won for women in general would benefit working-class women, and the proletarian movement, as well.

### "The early struggle for equal rights with men, in which women of property played a leading role, was thoroughly progressive."

The importance of this fight by the most privileged women should not be underestimated. It was totally progressive that women of the most important social and ideological underpinnings of class society. They were attacking the prevailing social norms, many of which survived from a previous epoch and were no longer in harmony with the new economic and social relations. The rights that were won—such as the opening of colleges and universities to women, the right of women to control their own wages or property, and the right to vote—loosened the bonds for all women and inspired them to struggle.

This is not to say that socialists agreed with all the demands raised or actions staged by every feminist group. Often deepgoing differences arose within the feminist movement itself, reflecting the perspectives and interests of different classes. But the early struggle for equal rights with men, in which women of property played a leading role, was thoroughly progressive.

Some in the fledgling socialist movement at that time—and one sometimes even hears the same thing today, unfortunately—maintained that this fight for equality was unimportant because it was "nothing but a bunch of bourgeois

women."

But if one pricked the hide of such "socialists," it usually becomes clear that their professed distain for the class background of these feminists concealed something much deeper: a contempt for all women, and a fear that "their" women might be infected with feminist ideas. It was an attempt to cover their own backwardness and bigotry with a dogmatic and primitive understanding of class society.

Fortunately, such spurious "Marxism" had nothing in common with the Marxism of Marx and Engels or Lenin and Trotsky.

### Impact on working women

On the other end of the social scale, capitalism had quite a different impact on women. For women of the lower classes it brought not leisure, but a crushing and grinding exploitation worse than anything women had experienced before.

As the industrial revolution developed, millions of men, women, and children were drawn off the land and into the cities. Small marginal farms were wiped out, and these families were forced into the city slums where they went to work in the factories and mines. There was no alternative to laboring twelve to fourteen hours a day; no alternative to sending the children to work at four, five, or six years old; no alternative to the genuinely inhuman exploitation that destroyed body and mind in a few short years.

Several aspects of this historical phenomenon deserve special attention.

First, as family after family was forced off the land and into the mines and factories, it was women and children—not men—who could most easily find work. The employers wanted women and children because they could get away with paying them less. This turned topsy-turvy all the most deep-rooted social mores and traditional relationships between men, women, and children.

As Marx observed in the late 1860s: "Modern industry, in overturning the economical foundation on which was based the traditional family, and the family labour corresponding to it . . . also unloosed all traditional family ties."

The second notable aspect of this transformation was the sheer numbers involved. In a relatively short period of time, a vast human migration took place, with masses of women torn out of centuries-old social patterns and thrust into a new world. From the very dawn of the industrial revolution, women were a sizable portion of the labor force. Women and children together constituted a majority in many basic industries.

Thus, women's labor was by no means marginal to the rise of capitalism. In fact, the



factory system was built on the superexploitation of women.

For example, if we take England, which was the home of the industrial revolution, statistics show that in the British cotton industry in 1835, less than 30 per cent of the work force were male adults; the rest were women and children. Marx cites figures to show that in 1861 the labor force in the British apparel industry was only about 40 per cent male. With some modification, the same pattern was true for every other industrialized country.

It should be remembered that the textile-apparel industry was not peripheral to the development of modern industry. It was at the very centre. And the English textile factories, which thrived on the superexploitation of women and children, in turn depended on the cotton grown and harvested by Black slave labor in the southern United States. The human victims on whose bones capitalism arose were widely dispersed.

Third, there was nothing unplanned or accidental about this role of women and children in production. The owners *consciously* used them to destroy the male monopoly in previously skilled trades and to drive down wage levels. In *Capital*, Marx points out that the cheapening of labor power is achieved by "sheer abuse of the labour of women and children, by sheer robbery of every normal condition requisite for working and living, and by the sheer brutality of over-work and night-work."

### Divide and rule

Thus, from the first days of the industrial revolution, the sex division within the working class was deliberately used by the bourgeoisie to weaken the workers' ability to resist, to divide and rule.

The result was that male workers often saw women and even children as their enemy, rather than the entire system of wage slavery and the tyranny of capital. In a similar manner workers often turned their anger and frustration against the introduction of new machines, which they saw as taking work away from them. Male workers would try to keep women out of skilled trades because their wages would fall if women were allowed to enter their field.

From the beginning, the ruling class justified the superexploitation of women on the basis of their responsibilities in the home. The British feminist and socialist Sheila Rowbotham, in her book *Hidden from History*, quotes a marvelously revealing comment by a Dr Andrew Ure in his book appropriately entitled *Philosophy of Manufactures*. Dr Ure piously congratulates his class as follows:

"Factory females have in general much lower wages than males, and they have been pitied on this account with perhaps injudicious sympathy, since the low price of their labour here tends to make household duties their most profitable as well as agreeable occupation and prevents them from being tempted by the mill to abandon the care of their offspring at home.

"Thus Providence effects its purpose."

Undoubtedly Dr Ure would have righteously denied that his views could be affected by the personal gain he and his class derived from that wage differential.

The most important point, however, is the fact that the capitalist class had a ready-made wedge to use in dividing and establishing its dominion over the working class. They used the traditional social division of labor in class society based on the subjugation of women. It provided a basis for discrimination that was sidely accepted as valid by most male and even female workers. Thus, for the fledgling workers movement to begin to develop class consciousness, it had to challenge those centuries-old traditions and assumptions of ruling-class ideology.

At the dawn of the industrial revolution, the idea that women might be *entitled* to equal pay for equal work was a revolutionary, subversive concept. Women were inferior. Everyone knew that. So how could their work be of equal value?

Today, the changes in the social role of women have produced changes in attitudes. In the advanced capitalist world, at least, relatively few people are prepared to argue against equal pay in principle. Nonetheless, women's wages still average less than 60 per cent of men's—an indication of the fact that superexploitation of women remains an indispensable feature of the capitalist system.

### Sojourner Truth: "Nobody ever helps me into carriages or over puddles, or gives me the best place—and ain't I a woman?"

The widespread acceptance of sex discrimination as "natural" is one of the most profitable things capitalism has going for it. Sexual inequality is built into the very foundations of capitalism; thus a struggle against that discrimination on all levels is an indispensable part of the struggle for socialism.

Today this includes the struggle for legal equality for women and for the Equal Rights Amendment. It includes the battle for the right to abortion and contraception. It includes the fight for preferential hiring and job upgrading. It includes the fight to win the ranks of the labor movement to understand that unity can be

forged only on the basis of the demands of the most oppressed. It includes the struggle to educate the working class on the basis of its own experience to see the interconnection of women's oppression, racist discrimination, and class exploitation.

All of these struggles are part of the fight for socialism, and without them socialism is impossible.

### Marxism and the family

The special discrimination against women in the labor market is founded on something even more basic to women's oppression than capitalism. That is the family system, an institution of class rule that existed long before

capitalism came on the historical scene.

The family system is built on the domestic enslavement and economic dependence of women. It is the institution that perpetuates the special oppression of women as a sex.

The Marxist attitude toward the family is one of the most misunderstood aspects of Marxist theory. Many who accept an historical materialist analysis of other phenomena—of the evolution of class society, the character of capitalist production, the progressive historical role of the working class, or the roots of national oppression and racism—will react against the idea that the family system is an institution of class rule and oppression.

This was well known to Marx and Engels. The section of the *Communist Manifesto* that deals with women and the family begins, "Abolition of the family! Even the most radical flare up at this infamous proposal of the Communists."

The reason why many react this way is simple. The basis of capitalist society is dog-eat-dog individual competition—worker against fellow worker, whether male or female. Capitalism teaches that the only way you as an individual can move ahead is at the expense of someone else. In this world of cutthroat competition, the family is the basic social unit, pitted against all other families, with its members considered responsible for each other and only for each other.

Thus each of us learns from childhood that if there is a soul on earth who cares whether you live or die, if there is a single human being who might sacrifice to help you in time of need, that individual is most probably someone in your family. In face of the strain, stress, and antagonisms that capitalism generates, the family is the place where an individual may have a chance of finding some warmth, affection, friendship, or love. To millions it is still the refuge, the haven, the source of strength that helps a person go out and face another day.

This is probably even more true among the oppressed national minorities. At least inside your family you are *partially* buffered against the culturally and psychologically destructive ravages of a racist society.

For these reasons, the idea that the family system is an institution of class and sex oppression can seem all wrong. And it can seem, on the other hand, that socialists must be trying to destroy the one haven left to human beings.

In fact, this is the opposite of what Marxists stand for. Our goal is to destroy the kind of world you need a refuge *from*, just to survive. Our goal is to place all human relations, including those between the sexes, on the basis of mutual respect, equality, and genuine affection by abolishing the economic compulsion and inequality upon



Sojourner Truth.





Early Lancashire cotton factory.

which the family system is built.

Of course, the family as an idyllic refuge is rarely the reality. The family as an institution is founded on the domestic inequality of women. No matter what else they do in addition, women are responsible for care of the children and the home. For countless women it is not a blissful abode but a prison from which there is no escape because they have no economic independence.

Even if the woman works and the man (if there is one) helps with the housework, the relationship cannot be one of equality because of the economic inequality of the woman. She is often hindered from striking off on her own for fear of economic hardship or her inability to make a decent living for herself and her children.

Children, too, are tied to the family unit—for better or for worse. They have nowhere else to go because of their total economic dependence.

Under the crushing weight of an inability to provide for dependent family members, how many "blissful abodes" turn into hellholes that generate battered wives and children, sexual assault, alcoholism and drug addiction, and thousands of murders a year? The dominant emotion becomes not love or affection, but hatred, mutual recrimination, and despair.

The goal of the revolutionary socialist movement is precisely to remove the economic compulsion that holds this basic unit of society together, thereby enabling superior forms of human relationships to develop. It is impossible to predict today what those superior relationships will look like. But it is clear that if we succeed in establishing a society based on total economic equality between men and women, a society that extends free public education and child development facilities down to include newborn infants; a society that uses science and technology to provide food services better than what you can cook at home, and

quality public laundries; a society that uses its resources to provide healthful and pleasant housing for all—it is clear that the kind of human relations that will grow from such soil will be richer and more human than any we can foresee today.

### Family and class society

With that clarification of the Marxist view of the family, we can look more closely at the family as an institution—where it came from, that functions it serves, and what has happened to it under capitalism. The best place to begin is by trying to answer the question: Why did Marx and Engels, the founders of scientific socialism, maintain that the family is an institution of class struggle?

Like everything else, the family is not a fixed, immutable entity, but an institution that has evolved. A good first step in trying to figure out what something is, is to look at its origins.

History is clear. The family arose on the basis of the destruction of the egalitarian traditions and structures of preclass society. It arose at the juncture in history when individuals began appropriating for personal property the surplus product created by the collective labor of the community. As private property began to develop, a mechanism or institution had to be created to regulate and uphold the unequal distribution of the necessities of life.

For example, assume that a Mr Rockefeller has much more grain and cattle than he needs to survive, while you and I have so little we can hardly stay alive. How is it decided that he can hoard his while we starve? The Rockefellers had to create a social mechanism by which they could relieve themselves of any responsibility for the well-being of others; and institution that would get rid of any general social obligation for human welfare, especially for children, the old, the sick, and others who produce less than they consume.

The family system is that institution. Mr Rockefeller takes care of his family, working people take care of theirs, and supposedly it is all fair and square.

Along with the family, of course, a few other institutions were required. Priests, cops, laws, judges, and jails were necessary to uphold this new division of wealth, by force and violence, because not everyone agreed that this was an equitable situation.

The second function of the family is to perpetuate this unequal division from one generation to the next. When Mr Rockefeller dies, for example, the family system assures that his wealth is not divided up for the common good, but is passed on to his children only. In this sense membership in a ruling-class family is first

and foremost a property arrangement; the social norm is that marriage should increase wealth, not decrease it.

The third advantage the family system holds for the ruling class is that it makes possible the cheapest possible reproduction of new generations of laboring masses, whether it be slaves, serfs, or wageworkers. Placing the total responsibility for care of the young on the parents means that the least possible portion of society's accumulated wealth—expropriated as private property—has to be tapped in order to assure reproduction of the laboring classes. This is why Rockefeller and his class are so stingy today when it comes to child care, welfare, medical care, and education programs.

The family is a well-tooled mechanism for driving down the costs of reproduction of labor to the barest socially acceptable minimum. Furthermore, with each family pitted against all others, atomised and fighting to gain a competitive edge, the most exploited and oppressed are less likely to unite in common action to take on the Rockefellers.

One of the reasons the family system is the cheapest possible means of reproduction is that it is based on—and in turn reinforces and perpetuates—a social division of labor based on sex. The family is founded on the unpaid labor of women in the home, where they work from dawn to dusk to meet the needs of the family members.

In capitalist terms, that work doesn't produce anything of value—that is, something that can be traded or sold on the market to increase someone's wealth. Thus, women's work is valueless or "worthless." It follows that women are also worth less. They are not equal to men, and any work they do is worth less than if men did it.

The system works well to maximise the private accumulation of society's wealth and to perpetuate the oppression of women.

### Do women have souls?

Sexist aspects of religion, laws, tradition, and social mores do not create, but rather reflect this basic economic subjugation of women. Their main purpose is to help convince those on the bottom that their oppression is "natural."

Thus for a good many centuries it was only the rare individual, the historical oddity, who even questioned the biological inferiority of women, with their supposed smaller brains and more emotional natures. In the Middle Ages, theologians (all males, of course) even debated whether women are human—do they have a soul, or are they like the higher animals such as horses and dogs? Women themselves internalised the attitudes and believed or accepted them.

A fifth function of the family institution is not as directly economic but no less crucial. That is its ideological role in teaching children from infancy on to accept the basic structures and premises of class society. The family setup helps force children to internalise the social values that they must learn to accept if they are to survive in class society—inequality, competition, authority and hierarchy, prejudice, and male and female sex roles. The system helps curb rebellious and nonconformist impulses and repress sexuality. From infancy to adolescence it helps mold the character and behavior of children.

From this point of view, too, the family system is an indispensable pillar of the state, whatever form of property relations it is based on, from

**"During the first industrial revolution, women and children were a majority in many basic industries. In fact, the factory system was built on the superexploitation of women."**

slavery to the nationalised property of the degenerated and deformed workers states.

Leon Trotsky called attention to this function of the family in his analysis of the Stalinist counterrevolution in the Soviet Union of the late 1920s and 1930s. He noted how the cult of the family and of motherhood was deliberately fostered by the Stalinist bureaucracy to try to halt the disintegration of the family system that had taken place under the impact of revolution and war. He pointed out that Stalin went much further than was necessary for strictly economic reasons. It was certainly true that the poverty of war-devastated Russia made it economically impossible to provide adequate child care, public laundries, and food services. But the family system was reinforced for political reasons.

"The most compelling motive" for the cult of the family, Trotsky wrote, "is undoubtedly the need of the bureaucracy for a stable hierarchy of relations, and for the disciplining of youth by means of 40,000,000 points of support for authority and power." This summarises exactly the ideological role of the family.

The family system has performed all of these five functions more or less rigorously throughout the history of class society, allowing, of course, for the fact that the family—like the state and private property—has evolved through different stages. In fact, it is amazing how flexibly the family institution has served class society.

In looking at what has happened to the family under capitalism, we come up against a question



that has generated some debate, especially among women who are both socialists and feminists.

This concerns a basic theme that runs through the writings of Marx and Engels. Frequently, when they touch on questions concerning women's oppression and the family, the assertion is made that the family has virtually disappeared under capitalism, especially in the working class. The *Communist Manifesto*, for example, refers to the "practical absence of the family among the proletarians." This assertion seems clearly erroneous on the face of it. One hundred and thirty years later, it is obvious that the family is still deeply entrenched in the working class, along with the sexism and chauvinist degradation that it entails.

Were Marx and Engels wrong? Is this a question on which Marxism has been way off base from the beginning?

No. Far from it. To draw such a conclusion would betray a very superficial understanding of what Marx and Engels were trying to get at. Their general assessment of the direction of development was totally correct. They certainly telescoped the historical process, and thereby produced some confusion; but they put their finger on a fundamental contradiction of the capitalist system that is crucial to understanding the oppression of women.

Acute observers that they were, they noted that the family system as a means of structuring and controlling the working class was being rapidly destroyed by the unregulated and unbridled, brutal exploitation of women and children in the early years of the industrial revolution. And in the process, the bourgeoisie was undermining one of the key props of its own class rule. Central to this process was the fact that under industrial capitalism a family of wage-laborers was no longer a productive unit.

The petty-bourgeois family of the previous era—that is, the family of the peasantry, small independent farmers, and urban tradespeople—worked together in the field or workshops as a productive unit. This was by no means an idyllic setup; men, women, and children worked to exhaustion. But one thing was certain: the individual members of the family had no possibility of economic independence. The family could only survive by sticking together.

But this changed as millions of families were forced off the farms and mass production developed. In the factories and mines, the family was no longer a productive unit; each member was exploited separately, by selling his or her laboring power to a boss as an individual worker. The males were frequently not the economically dominant person in this family unit, as has been noted earlier, often only the women and children

could find work.

In his classic study *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Engels described the results of this complete social upheaval. He noted that the traditional sex roles were turned upside down and "the wife is the breadwinner while her husband stays at home to look after the children and do the cleaning and cooking." He emphasises how psychologically and morally destructive this was to both men and women.

### The Black family in the ghetto

It could be noted in this connection that what was happening in the English working class as a whole at the beginning of the industrial revolution helps shed some light on the much-discussed question of the Black family in the ghettos of the United States.

It is worth recalling that the previous claim to fame of Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the crude racist reactionary who spoke for US imperialism in the United Nations, was his "theory of the Black matriarchy." According to Moynihan, the Black family has always been pathologically ill and the main problem is Black women. They are responsible for the problems of Black families, especially for emasculating the men, because they don't allow men to be the breadwinners.

Engels had a different analysis. He held the capitalist system to be responsible for the human suffering produced by racism, poverty, and crushing oppression. He demonstrated that the capitalist system itself was destroying the family among the most exploited layers of society. And he further noted that if so much misery results when the traditional sexual roles are turned on their head, then there must be something wrong when they are right side up as well.

### "The goal of the socialist movement is to remove the inequality and economic compulsion that the family system is based on."

"... we shall have to accept the fact," Engels wrote, "that to complete a reversal of the role of the two sexes can be due only to some radical error in the original relationship between men and women. If the rule of the wife over her husband—a natural consequence of the factory system—is unnatural, then the former rule of the husband over the wife must also have been unnatural."

While the brutal destruction of the old social relationships caused terrible misery, Marx and Engels emphasised that the introduction of women and young people into the labor market was laying the basis for a new and superior form



of the family and a new basis for sexual relations.

This is where Marx and Engels part company with Moynihan, who is against moving forward to a new and better system of human relations. He supports instead the reinforcement of the system based on domestic slavery of women, because that is in the interests of the class that bought him.

Moynihan and the capitalist class of today are alarmed by exactly the same thing that alarmed the bourgeoisie of Engels's time. The ruling class in the early years of the industrial revolution realised that unless countermeasures were taken, the increasing employment of women under the existing conditions would lead to a total disintegration of the family system and a threat to capitalist rule. With the exploitation of women and children running wild, how were household tasks to be done? How were the young children to be cared for, disciplined, and educated? Who was to pay for this?

The disintegration of the family began to pose sharply the social responsibility for care of the young, the old, those who cannot work. If the family is unable to take on these functions, the only alternative is for society to take them on; but that would mean a vast redistribution of wealth, ultimately entailing a total reorganisation of society on a cooperative basis.

The British ruling class came to the conclusion

that the process of disintegration of the family had to be reversed. Lord Shaftesbury, one of the more perspicacious voices of the capitalist class at that time, commented bluntly that if the factory system were allowed to go unchecked, "domestic life and domestic discipline must soon be at an end, society will consist of individuals no longer grouped in families. . . ."

The ruling class came to a realisation that there was a contradiction between the long-term interests of the capitalist system and the short-term interests of each individual capitalist in squeezing every drop of blood out of their workers for sixteen hours a day and letting them die at thirty. A more rational regulation of exploitation was called for.

So the capitalist state, which represents the collective interests of the class, stepped in (as it has many times in the past 150 years) to save the system by halting the unbridled destruction of the family system. The ten-hour day was legislated for women to permit them to spend a few more hours a day at their domestic chores. The beginning of a public education system was instituted. Some protective laws were passed concerning female and child labor. A few public health measures were adopted.

Thus exploitation was rationalised and the family system was shored up. The balance of male versus female and child labor was redressed. Over time children became a smaller and smaller component of the work force and the superexploitation of women was partially mitigated by the improvement of working conditions and the reinforcement of the family system. Male-female economic relations shifted back toward the traditional hierarchy.

### Recurring cycle

In Britain this first redressing the balance occurred around the mid-nineteenth century. But the same cycle has recurred again and again in the last century because it is rooted in a fundamental contradiction of capitalism. Since women can be employed for lower wages, and therefore squeezed for higher profits, the capitalists are compelled by competition to integrate the maximum number of them into the labor force, especially in periods of war and economic boom. Two recent examples of this occurred in this country, during World War II and then again in the boom of the 1960s. During the 1960s, the Census Bureau reported, two-thirds of all new jobs were taken by women.

But this process always means that an increasing number of women gain a greater degree of economic independence, the disintegration of the family system is accelerated, and as a result, the state is forced to take more



responsibility for the functions that were women's domestic chores, especially child care and education.

As the process continues, women begin thinking they have a right to a job and a right to childcare centres for their children. But when the business cycle turns the corner and the recession or depression comes, women are pushed out of the labor market in greater proportion than men. The bosses count on prevailing sexist attitudes to assure that large female unemployment will be less socially explosive than large male unemployment.

Simultaneously, the capitalists drive to cut back on all social expenditures, such as child care. Such cutbacks have a double function. Lack of child-care facilities helps force many women out of the job market; and the bosses use the slashes to force individual families to resume a greater part of the burden of childbearing.

Women are again pushed back into the home. The result is not only a temporary decline in total employment of women, but a decline in the standard of living of the working class and the reinforcement of the stricter "woman's place is in the home." This offensive against women plays a key role in enabling the capitalists to place the burden of their economic crises on the backs of the working class.

Today we see the ruling class again trying to force enough women out of the labor force to recreate an industrial reserve army (as Marx called it) of unemployed with a large female component. But the capitalists face a problem: women are resisting more than ever before. The struggle takes many forms, including the fight for rights on the job and in the trade unions, the demand that they not be laid off in greater

proportion than men, and demands for child care, abortion rights, and the Equal Rights Amendment.

The widespread support for the ERA, for example, is a form of resistance to the whole concept that women are not equal as human beings in every sense. Whatever their opportunistic rhetoric, the bosses don't like the growing popularity of the ERA. The belief that women are not equal is useful to them in countless ways. One small example is their attempt to get away with not counting women in the unemployment statistics. The government economists have been arguing that current unemployment statistics are "artificially" high because of the historically unprecedented numbers of women who are simply refusing to get out of the labor market. The government is not to blame for high unemployment rates, you see. It's all the fault of the women's liberation movement!

The battle of statistics is simply a modern capitalist version of the medieval theologians' debate over whether women have souls.

So the process that Marx and Engels called attention to 130 years ago continues to unfold. More women are working than ever before; the divorce rate is climbing; more women are refusing to marry, or remarry; more and more women are heads of households; the trend is unquestionably toward disintegration of the family.

Thus the founders of Marxism had a profound insight into a fundamental contradiction of capitalism: its need to employ more women in order to increase profits, and its countervailing need to prevent the breakdown of the family system. This is one reason why there can be no women's liberation under capitalism.

### Two mis-estimations

At the same time, Marx and Engels obviously mis-estimated two things. The first miscalculation applies not only to their assertions about the family but also a number of other areas. The *Communist Manifesto*, for example, states not only that the family had disappeared, but that national differences had been virtually eliminated, and that the petty bourgeoisie had been absorbed into the working class.

When Trotsky wrote an introduction to a new edition of the *Communist Manifesto* on the ninetieth anniversary of its publication, he commented on this. He remarked that Marx and Engels had made "an under-estimation of future possibilities latent in capitalism, and, on the other [hand], an over-estimation of the revolutionary maturity of the proletariat." They under-estimated the hold of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideology, the depth of racist and sexist attitudes, and the conservatism of human

thought in class society.

Marx and Engels understood that there was no long-term, historical basis for the deep social divisions inside the working class. Objectively, racist, sexist, and national divisions are contrary to the class interests of working people. But they under-estimated the ability of the ruling class to use such divisions to sharpen competition in the labor market, to prevent workers from uniting in defence of their common interests, and to block the development of genuine class consciousness.

The second miscalculation of Marx and Engels is related to the first. They underestimated the ideological role of the family itself and its centrality to the maintenance of capitalism. They underestimated the ability of capitalism—which had not yet exhausted its productive possibilities—to slow down the pace of disintegration of the family.

Of course, Trotsky and other Marxists who came on the historical scene later than Marx and Engels had a tremendous advantage. Today we can draw on the experiences and lessons of decades of class struggle that they did not see. But we can begin from their astoundingly perceptive insights into the basic processes of capitalism, and build on this foundation to deepen our understanding and prepare ourselves to meet the tasks confronting us today.

The tasks and prospects before the women's movement and the workers movement of today are quite different from what they were at the time of Marx or at the time of the first massive wave of feminism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

### Prospects for revolution

This first wave of the feminist movement on a world scale arose out of the deep contradictions of a capitalist system that was on the ascendancy. It was a product of the industrial revolution—the horrors of exploitation and the tremendous revolutionary changes that it brought for women.

In the United States, this process was marked by the special features of American capitalist development. These included the existence of the frontier, the massive immigration from Europe and above all the existence of chattel slavery throughout the South. The latter meant that full development of the contradictions of industrial capitalism was postponed until the defeat of the slave system in the Civil War.

The abolitionist movement of 1830–40 inspired the first radicalisation of women. But it was only at the end of the century and in the pre-World War I period—during the deep social ferment that has been referred to as the Debs period—that the early feminist movement, the early labor movement, and the early socialist

movement reached their peak.

While our nineteenth and early twentieth century sisters in struggle made great strides in altering social consciousness and opening new doors to women both economically and politically, their possibilities were limited—just as the prospects of the labor and socialist movements of the time were limited. The limitations stemmed not from their own desires, but from the objective conditions they faced, from the stage of capitalist development, and from their lack of experience and understanding.

In retrospect, the surprising thing is not how backward these fighters were, but rather that some managed to be so farsighted about these questions of women's oppression and a program of struggle for ending it.

**"The process that Marx called attention to 130 years ago continues to unfold. More women are working, the divorce rate is climbing, more women are heads of households. The trend is toward disintegration of the family."**

The first wave of the feminist movement reached its high-water mark with the Russian revolution of 1917, in the sense that the October revolution went further than any other in history toward trying to consciously reorganise society to assure the liberation of women. (This, of course, was before Stalin revived the most benighted notions of medievalism and called them Leninism.)

To understand the significance of the women's radicalisation of today and what it means for the coming American socialist revolution, it is helpful to make some comparisons with the Russian revolution.

In its 1971 resolution, *Towards a Mass Feminist Movement*, the Socialist Workers Party emphasised that the second wave of the feminist movement, which began in the late 1960s, was based on, and grew out of, the changes brought about by the technological revolution of World War II and the postwar boom. We pointed especially to three developments and their impact on women: the technological advances, the increase in the number of women in the labor force, and the broad radicalisation of the 1960s.

How do developments in these three areas compare to the situation in Russia in 1917?

In regard to scientific and technological advances, the impact on women has been above all in two areas: birth control and the mechanisa-

Banner in 1917 demonstration in Russia reads: "Voting rights for women."





tion of household chores.

It is hard to over-estimate the revolutionary implications of the development of relatively safe, inexpensive, virtually 100 per cent effective birth control methods. Women of our generation can take for granted the possibility of controlling our reproductive functions. But that *precondition* for women's liberation has been a reality for only the past 15 years.

At the time of the Russian revolution, only the most primitive and ineffective means were available. The *right* of women to control their own bodies was a dream of the future. Only the most farsighted (among them was Lenin) saw a woman's right to obtain a safe abortion as a basic democratic right.

In the area of household chores—"women's work"—science and technology have today drastically reduced the number of hours of labor needed to take care of the basic needs of a family. We have electric appliances, prepared foods, throwaway diapers, permanent press clothes, and so forth.

This has meant a staggering change by comparison with conditions in 1917, resulting in the liberation of time and energy that women can channel toward cultural, educational, and political horizons never before possible.

In the second area, participation of women in the labor force, the contrast is equally great. Since World War II in the United States there has been a sizable increase both in the percentage of the total work force that is female and in the percentage of women who work. I don't have figures for the Soviet Union in 1917, but we can gauge the degree of change by taking figures for the United States. In 1910, only 25 per cent of women of working age were in the labor force in this country. Today 45 per cent of all women sixteen and older are working.

But Russia was a far more backward country than the United States. There were a few large concentrations of industry that employed significant numbers of women (in 1917 women constituted 40 per cent of the Russian labor force), but the working class in Russia was very small compared with the total population. The overwhelming majority of women in Russia were peasants who had barely emerged from conditions of serfdom. The social attitudes they lived under were those of feudalism, such as existed in the fifteenth or sixteenth century in Britain or other countries of Europe. The position of the mass of women in 1917 Russia—and the attitude of most women toward themselves—is captured by the old proverb: "I thought I saw two people, but it was only a man and his wife."

Thus, another *precondition* of women's liberation did not exist at the time of the Russian revolution—the massive introduction of women

into the labor market, together with the urbanisation, education, and cultural advances that such an advance entails.

The third factor behind the feminist upsurge in this country was the involvement of significant numbers of women in the general political activity and radicalisation of the 1960s. This brought about a sharpened awareness by women of our own oppression. Many began to realise that our deep feelings of insecurity and rebellion were not personal problems, but social and political. Women began to seek political solutions, to develop a program of struggle, and to organise ourselves to fight back.

This is the area where there was the greatest similarity to conditions at the time of the Russian revolution. But the character, social scope, and consciousness of the radicalisation in Russia was necessarily limited by the backwardness of capitalist development there.

In Russia the women's movement was not comparable in size and influence to what had arisen in some other European countries and in the United States.

This backwardness and lack of a more prominent women's movement was reflected in the composition of the Marxist movement. I don't know the exact membership figures for women in the Bolshevik party in 1917, but I know it was under 10 per cent. The percentage of women delegates at Bolshevik congresses was even lower.

Even in the American Socialist Party at the height of the suffrage struggle and the pre-World War I radicalisation, things were not much better. At the SP's 1912 convention, only 9 per cent of the delegates were women. And the women were jubilant to be so strong!

The scope of change is clear by comparison with the situation in the Socialist Workers Party today. At the 1976 SWP convention, of the delegates elected to set the policies for this party and determine implementation of those policies, 44 per cent were women.

The independent feminist movement that has arisen in the United States today is of a scope and depth unlike anything before in history. From its inception, this feminist movement began to pose the general social problems faced by women and to consider what changes in the *structure* of society would be necessary to free women. Women are studying the history of the feminist movement, the labor movement, and the socialist movement to try to learn from them and consider the alternative programs and analyses. As the radicalisation deepens in this country, we can be certain that this feminist movement will not diminish but will grow.

This is a key difference with all previous revolutions. In no country where a socialist

revolution has taken place has there existed a mass feminist movement as one of the fighting components mobilising forces for the revolution. This is also *one* of the factors assuring that none of these revolutions were carried through to the end.

History has shown that in some circumstances a revolutionary transformation of property relations can be achieved without a mass women's movement—although I would argue that it is no longer possible, in any advanced capitalist country at least.

*But it is impossible for the working class to carry through the social revolution and the socialist reconstruction of society unless masses of women are mobilised to play a conscious and leading role.*

## Women will free women

The reason for this is simple. What is called the "woman question"—that is, the abolition of domestic servitude and the eradication of economic compulsion as the determining factor in all human relations—is actually a matter of the reorganisation of society itself from top to bottom. After the question of ownership and control of factories, mines, banking, and transportation, the social relations of *reproduction* are the most important factor in the organisation of society.

Unlike the Stalinists and social democrats, the

**"The struggle for the Equal Rights Amendment, for the right to abortion, for preferential hiring and job upgrading for women are all part of the fight for socialism. Without such struggles, socialism is impossible."**

Socialist Workers Party does not believe that the working class will "give" women their liberation. Women will liberate women.

We cannot do it alone, of course; and we do not pretend there are no class differences among women. We will liberate ourselves fighting as a component of, and as an ally of, the working class, which is the only progressive class that exists and the only social force capable of knocking the capitalist minority out of the driver's seat.

But women should wait for no one. Those who would be free themselves must strike the blow.

A mass, independent feminist movement is not simply desirable; it is a precondition for a victorious socialist revolution in the United States.

One indication of the truth of this statement is the impact that the women's liberation movement has had throughout this society. Women's demands and consciousness of women's oppression have already become intertwined with every other social struggle that has developed.

In the labor movement, demands for equal pay and preferential hiring for women and national minorities have become the battering ram for challenging the bosses' game of divide and rule, beating back racism and sexism, and laying the basis for real class-conscious unity in struggle against the boss.

Through organisations such as the Coalition of Labor Union Women and women's caucuses and ERA committees in the unions, women are playing a leading role in the fight to transform the unions into revolutionary instruments of class struggle.

In recent years, the civil rights struggle of Blacks in this country was the most decisive single factor in helping to raise women's consciousness of their oppression and inspiring them to fight. The women's movement has in turn helped strengthen the consciousness and combative force of Blacks and other oppressed minorities. The obvious parallels and interconnection between racism and sexism, and between women's liberation and national liberation, have the effect of deepening our understanding of both.

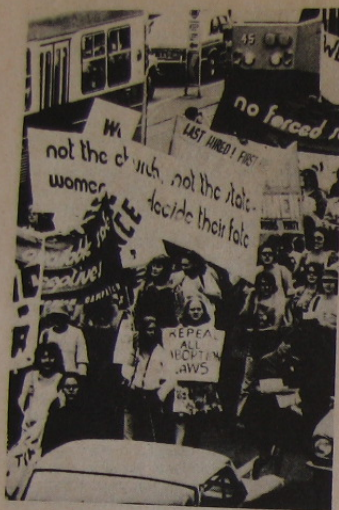
Furthermore, the triple oppression of Black women, Chicanas, and Puertorriquetas directly ties together the struggles against class, national, and sex oppression, giving their fight an explosive force and great social weight.

The women's liberation movement has also affected the student movement and social and cultural values among young people in general. From the beginning, it has been closely interrelated with the gay liberation movement. Feminist ideas have deeply affected attitudes on all sexual questions, battering away at sex roles and stereotypes.

Finally, the women's movement has had its impact on the revolutionary Marxist movement as well. It has made the Socialist Workers Party vastly more conscious, helping us strengthen our program and sharpen our understanding of our goals and the kind of proletarian party it will take to achieve them. The feminist movement has aided socialist women in developing confidence and coming forward as leaders. It has released a revolutionary potential that might otherwise have remained locked inside all of us.

The existence of this movement and the impact it has already had on society is among the most promising signs that the conditions and human forces for leading the American socialist revolution are maturing. Whether we can





succeed where others before us have failed remains to be decided. But the changes that capitalism has wrought in the status and consciousness of women, and the new confidence of the hundreds of thousands of women who are joining our sister Sojourner Truth in proudly asserting, "Ain't I a woman?"—this permits all of us to be optimistic about the future.

In 1917, when the All Russian Congress of Soviets convened in Petrograd on the evening after the fall of the discredited Kerensky regime, Lenin went to the tribune and announced quite simply but with an acute sense of history, "We shall now proceed to construct the socialist order."

When it comes our turn to begin that colossal task on US soil, we will be glad that a massive, fighting women's liberation movement is here to help lead the way.

## Review 1.

**Damned Whores and God's Police**  
by Anne Summers.  
Penguin, 1975

Now that the second wave of feminism has been rising for a number of years, there is a literature documenting its development which is impressive both in its volume and in its general level of discussion. As one would expect, the growth of the movement has been accompanied and assisted by the flowering of a literature and an art which are as dynamic as the movement itself.

Nowhere is this documentation more necessary than in historical writing. In this realm, women have often been entirely omitted from the narrative or have received a nervously appended chapter on "Women" which is supposed in some way to make up for their omission from the main narrative. But the growing consciousness of women is producing a re-evaluation of human history in which women are beginning to receive the attention which their real role demands.

This development has been occurring on a much broader level than that of feminism alone. In recent years there has been an expansion of historical studies and writing about such groups as Blacks, women, working people and minorities. Even the conservative *Times Literary Supplement* recently recognised that these "muted groups" do not have their experiences recorded except through the eyes of the holders of power. More and more, traditional academic historians are being made aware of this as women, migrants and Blacks attack the sexism and racism of their analyses and their general failure to recognise the class nature of society.

Nevertheless, the task Ann Summers set herself in writing *Damned Whores and God's Police* required a good deal of courage and tenacity. Male elitists find it easy to trivialise books written by feminists on the grounds that

# Damned Whores and God's Police

By Fran Jelley

Anne Summers.



they are not academically "respectable" or not really history or the "truth" or that they are "biased" or any of a large number of other pseudo-scientific terms.

Two years after its first publication, the book now features on women's studies courses all over the country. The ideas it raises merit attention, particularly because the women's liberation movement has in recent years attracted a growing number of women whose experience of the discussion of major theoretical questions facing the movement has been very slight.

### A new look

For this reason, a new look at the contribution of Ann Summers to Australian women's liberation literature is timely. Distance and new experience offer some fresh reflections on the ideas contained in it. On re-reading the book, I found that many of its concerns are again confronting the women's movement.

Where were the roots of the book? What are the political convictions on which the book is based and/or what political conclusions flow from it? These questions are the most important for the women's movement because feminism is based on the belief that we can effect real social and political change.

The book is divided into two major sections, a distinction in parts One and Two between women and Part Two their history—although Summers does stipulate in the introduction that it is neither sociology nor history, since she found that she could not follow "the established conventions of Australian historical or sociological writing." (p 20) Nevertheless, there is a distinction in Parts One and Two between where we are now and how we got here.

One outstanding chapter in the first section is Summers' description of the Poverty of Dependence. She explains the "hidden" poverty of womanhood—hidden, that is, by the ideological weaponry of anti-woman forces and in particular by the mythology concerning the work done by women in maintaining the home and in the reproduction and rearing of children.

Summers recognises the fact that women suffer oppression as *women* irrespective of the class position of their husbands. This is a conception that needs constant reaffirmation, as some activists in the movement seem in danger of forgetting this cornerstone of women's liberation theory. In the last few months, some women have been attracted by currents which seek to prevent women from uniting with each other across class lines. These currents often proffer the idea of a "communist women's movement" as the next stage for women's liberation. While few feminists will buy the whole package, being justifiably suspicious of the people marketing it, they are often lulled into taking false positions which they believe are in the interests of working-class women because they seem somehow more radical and also, perhaps, because of their awareness of their own advantages in terms of education, relative independence and the knowledge necessary to control their fertility.

It is true that women of different social classes suffer to very different degrees from lack of child-care and abortion facilities, unequal pay, job discrimination, sexist education and social conditions. But women suffer these oppressions *precisely because they are women*, and the unity in struggle of all women is possible and progressive if this unity is based on clearly defined demands which mobilise women and



combat the oppression perpetrated by capitalism. Of course there are some women we don't expect to see in our ranks. We don't expect to see many female members of the bourgeoisie fighting beside us. Women, like men, are a multi-class sex. But it remains true that women suffer a special oppression as women.

#### Housework

But although Summers rightly points out the universality of women's oppression, she finds it necessary to explain this universality by arguing that housework is productive labor in an economic sense. In order to explain how it is that the wife of the managing director of a multinational corporation is in the same position of economic dependence as the wife of a factory worker, she writes:

"The social status of the two women is of course very different but their objective economic position is the same and this is what the traditional Marxist analysis, in its failure to recognise housework as productive labour, has neglected to take into account." (p 135)

The question of whether or not housework is productive labor has come to be a cause celebre in women's literature. *New Left Review* published one of the first articles specifically on housework in 1967. That article is indeed a reminder of the tremendous growth of women's liberation theory since that time. It was a simple but moving personal account by one woman of her own experiences as a housewife. The concluding lines show the lack of theoretical development at the time. "S.G." wrote:

"In postscript, it is obvious that (son) Carl is quite the best thing that has ever happened to me. And (husband) Joe isn't a tyrant." (*New Left Review*, No 43, p 54)

Sounds strangely dated, doesn't it? And yet it highlights one of the problems the movement has been obliged to face: how to recognise what many women do every day as important and yet attack the origins of their oppression. There are still many women on the edge of the women's liberation movement who feel that husbands and children are the best thing that has happened to them, who like staying at home, etc, etc, and who are under the illusion that feminism prescribes a life style which they themselves do not desire. Of course, in practice, a raised consciousness is reflected in changed behavior.

It seems to me that some feminists have felt obliged to meet such ideas half way. One method of doing this was to concentrate on attempting to get a "Wages for Housework" campaign off the ground. Such a campaign is unlikely to succeed. This is due in part to the reasonable suspicion that most feminists feel about anything which

might assist in keeping women confined in the home.

It is in trying to resolve such difficulties that some feminists have concluded that housewives are engaged in economically productive labor. If this is the case, then their oppression is essentially the same exploitation suffered by the working class under capitalism. Summers claims that Mariarosa Dalla Costa argues that the reproduction of the labor force is in and of itself productive labor. My own reading of Dalla Costa is that while she does argue that housework is productive labor, she is reasonably vague about reproduction.

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Reproduction—like housework as well—is of course "socially vital," as Summers calls it. But this does not mean that it is productive labor in an economic sense and that the housewife is therefore exploited in the same fashion as the worker. In a capitalist economy, productive labor is labor which adds to the exchange value of commodities. Whether or not labor is socially useful is irrelevant to the question of its economic productivity or non-productivity. Ernest Mandel explains:

"The concepts of productive and unproductive labour from the standpoint of production of new value must not be confused with the concepts of productive and unproductive labour from the standpoint of the general interests of society. When they produce dum-dum bullets, opium or pornographic novels, workers create new value, since these commodities, finding as they do buyers on the market, possess a use-value which enables them to realise their exchange-value. But from the standpoint of the general interests of human society, these workers have done work which is absolutely useless, even harmful. By recording the arrival and departure of goods in a big shop, or by enabling consumers to choose between different examples of a given commodity, workers employed in the sphere of trade work which is useful and productive from the standpoint of society's general interests—without, for all that, creating any new value." (*Marxist Economic Theory*, The Merlin Press,

1968, p 191.)

Although Summers goes astray on the question of housework as economically productive labor, it is obviously important to understand just how housework *does* fit into the capitalist system. This would include understanding how the notion of the "family wage" developed through the 19th and early 20th centuries and how it became one of the mechanisms by which women were forced into marriage to escape poverty—only to remain poor after marriage. To quote Wally Seacombe, who analyses the problem in *The Housewife and her Labour Under Capitalism* (London 1975):

"It is as if capital were directing a play entitled 'The Working Day.' The curtain rises to reveal a group of industrial labourers crowding around the gates of a factory preparing to be hired to work for a day in return for a wage. The audience finds the action on stage so absorbing that they accept the immediate appearance of the play as reality. In doing so, they forget that the actors are not the sole agents of the onstage action. Backstage are a group of stage hands (housewives) who have been preparing the workers for the opening curtain for hours beforehand. Although these workers are out of sight and therefore out of mind, they are nevertheless indispensable to the entire production."

Seacombe's analysis of the role of housework in capitalism is worthy of closer attention than is warranted in this article. Suffice it to say that housewives have been conscripted into participating in the maintenance of their own poverty, but because of their essential role in preparing the wage labourers they are unlikely to be able to be mobilised in such a way as to disturb the social order. Dalla Costa's conception of the home as a social factory, which Summers seems to accept, entirely misses the features and role of the family specific to the capitalist mode of production.

Chapter six of the first part of the book is in some senses a key chapter in the development of the book for conscious feminists, for it is here that many of the current concerns of political activists in the movement first begin to receive attention. While the first five chapters contained a great deal of useful information and stated in plain, bold language many of the basic lies perpetrated concerning women through the culture we experience, I did not find myself turning down the corners of very many pages to remind me to reread and think about particular observations. The important exception to this was the section I have already discussed concerning the economic significance of the housewife's labor, and in many ways that chapter would seem out of place in what I imagine was



intended as a section for women fairly new to the movement. These early sections must have proved tremendously valuable in the raising of consciousness among educated women on the periphery of the movement since the material contained in these chapters must be familiar to many thousands of women who are not in contact with each other, isolated in their homes even though they received an education or vocational training.

#### Central metaphor

The Family of Woman section probably charts the evolution of many feminists' development for it deals with the kinds of issues that a woman faces in her political development as a conscious feminist. It is the chapter in which the central metaphor of the book is explained; that is, the notion that women are forced to act out one or other of both of two stereotypes, the damned whore or one of god's police.

It is of course an image that many of the readers of the book would relate to very strongly, since they themselves were probably having their early sexual experiences at a time when relatively more adequate contraception was becoming available to unmarried women. Many readers will remember the extraordinary courage and bravado required to engage in an active sexual



experience and the social stigma attached to so doing. The damned whore image is in fact a symbol which probably had its origins in the so-called sexual revolution of the mid-sixties. The references to *Oz* and the elucidation of the oppression of women's sexuality that characterised much of the first two hundred pages of the book reminded me of that popular seller of the time, *Now You'll Think I'm Awful* and its author, Sue Rhodes. And sure enough, a reference to Sue Rhodes turns up shortly after the introduction of the damned whores/god's police image.

The point of all this is that Summers' writing reflects the history of the development of a whole generation of radicalisation and one with which many of her readers would be familiar: the radicalisation of the late sixties, the emergence of a conscious women's liberation movement and a gay movement. Attendant on this were the greater availability of contraception, the increased educational standard of young people and the fruits of a twenty year boom.

This concurrence of events has probably brought about the present predominance of vocal demands of student and educated women, and men, for greater sexual freedom. Consequently the damned whore/god's police image appears to be of great significance. But is it really? Let us examine what it really means for feminists and political activists who are concerned to get their understanding of history right.

Summers is, however, describing a much more all-pervasive phenomenon to do with the ideology of the oppressor. The ideology of the ruling class is tailored to defend the status quo and designed to erect obstacles in the way of the growth of practices that threaten the present order. For this reason, all oppressed people feel some sort of social sanction such as social ostracism, imprisonment and the many other punitive measures, including the creation of images such as wogs, dykes, coons, poofs and now drole-bludgers, and an accompanying set of slanders to incite fear and distrust among the other layers of the oppressed.

All the oppressed are familiar with the experience of low self-esteem, which is the damned whore experience, and of the corresponding pseudo-gratitude that the society shows to those women—and, I presume, their equivalents among other layers of the oppressed—who accept the subservient norm to gain social acceptability: the right to be an unpaid babysitter for one's grandchildren or the gold watch and chain from the firm for forty years of devoted service as a clerk.

So there is no debate about the experience that Summers documents in the twin images of damned whores and god's police. What I think

requires amplification is the fact that this ideological warfare is but part of the entire armament of capitalism in its oppression of the mass of people. Perhaps in seeking to understand the entire process Summers might have recognised the need to wage the campaign on many fronts and in a relentless and scientific fashion. And that is precisely what is wrong with the use made of the symbols of the title: They cease to be symbols and are presented as the seeds of oppression. Summers says of her work in the introduction that the recognition of the sexist division of societies has to be coupled "both with a comprehensive understanding of the complex and subtle ways in which sexism permeates every facet of social and economic organisation and with a revolutionary strategy for undermining it." (p 27)

She sees her book as contributing to the first requirement and, one infers, believes that this is an essential part of the revolutionary process, which of course it is.

But it is essential that this observation be based on a materialist conception of history. By concentrating on the building up of an *image* that holds the conception of the book together, Summers often goes beyond the limits of materialist objectivity.

The subjective factors of oppression are contingent upon larger objective factors in women's existence. That is why Summers' confusion on the question of the role of housework under capitalism is of such importance. It is part of a generalised failure to distinguish between objective and subjective factors in oppression.

The acknowledgement of the difference between the two kinds of oppression will not mean that the latter factors are passed over or ignored but rather that there will be a redistribution of relative weight. Much of the book contains deadly accurate accounts of the mechanics of oppression. But the acceptance of two levels of oppression would necessarily involve a difference in the dominant themes of the book. For example, the metaphorical title would probably not be appropriate as the major thesis of the book. What would emerge would be a book which concentrated on the legal and political agencies which underpin the whole existence of sexism and the methods of proceeding with their destruction.

Because Summers does not make this distinction, she opens the door to the kind of criticism levelled at the book in Jean Curthoys' review in *Arena*. Summers' analysis of the family is a hotch potch of ideas, some right and some, I believe, wrong. Nevertheless, the centrality of the family as the key instrument of women's oppression remains. A materialist analysis, however, would

have shown the imbalance of Curthoys' observation that the book failed to recognise that women of different classes are oppressed in different ways. She went on to assert that "in so obscuring class difference between women, the theory gets so absorbed into a subtle and unwanted hegemony of the outlook of middle class women within the women's movement, a hegemony which will hamper efforts to create political unity between women of different classes." (*Arena*, No 41, 1976, p 99)

**"Reproduction—like housework as well—is of course 'socially vital', as Summers calls it. But this does not mean that it is productive labor in an economic sense and that the housewife is therefore exploited in the same fashion as the worker. In a capitalist economy, productive labor is labor which adds to the exchange value of commodities. Whether or not labor is socially useful is irrelevant to the question of its productivity or non-productivity."**

Curthoys sees Summers' concentration on the family as mistaken and concludes that Summers is soft on the early feminists, failing to recognise that their fatal mistake on the question of the family was a function of their class position. She picks Summers up on her failure to spend sufficient time on working class women's political organisation, suggesting that this is because these organisations have little to do with the family.

This omission is noticeable but it does not invalidate Summers' conclusions about the oppressive role of the family. Both areas are important. To put it another way, a working class woman trade unionist who sees her first priority in struggling around on-the-job questions is not exempted from the special oppression of being a housewife or member of a family.

Of course Summers, as a conscious feminist, is aware of the responsibility to *action* and consequently devotes a good deal of attention to the family. As she writes:

"Women's cultural impotence and their economic dependence are a twin-pronged manacle which forces them into families and

ensures that while they remain within them they conform to quite rigidly defined roles. Conformity to these roles is the main insurance most women have against exclusion, poverty and neglect." (p 145)

It is unfortunate, then, that given her awareness of the need for action, she did not give more emphasis to the conclusion to the book, *Prospects for Liberation*.

One reason for this could have been that Summers recognised the existence of oppression and could describe it in fine detail—450 pages worth—but could offer no clear road to liberation. She documents some of the false roads to liberation and understands the reformist nature of Women's Electoral Lobby politics, the futility of separatism that has led to the establishment of all-women communes, and the difficulties involved in establishing refuges and crisis centres.

It is a pity that Summers did not concentrate her analysis on the more formal structures of women's liberation and assess their growth and development. For despite her pessimism, aspects of the movement do show signs of development and consolidation. The women's liberation general meetings in Sydney, for example, are a concrete expression of the continuing movement. There are other action groups which continue to attract women who wish to be involved in political struggle. There have been successful mobilisations of thousands of women on International Women's Day around a variety of concrete demands.

Summers thinks that the winning of equal pay, child-care, reproductive freedom and so on, will not end sexism. She is right, but abstractly so. The struggle to win these rights will manifestly alter society and is an integral part of the class struggle. In that struggle, women will learn what forms of organisation are necessary to them to effect the final abolition of sexism from human relations.



## Review 2.

# Rosa Luxemburg and the National Question

By George Breitman

The National Question

Selected Writings by Rosa Luxemburg

Edited and with an introduction by Horace Davis. Monthly Review Press, 1976.

In his 1967 book *Nationalism and Socialism: Marxist and Labor Theories of Nationalism to 1917*, Horace B. Davis included a summary of Rosa Luxemburg's views on the right of self-determination and his hope that eventually her most important writings on this subject would be translated into English.

This was desirable because Luxemburg was Lenin's chief adversary in the most important discussions about nationalism ever held in the Marxist movement, and while Lenin's contributions in this discussion have been available in English for many years (in his *Collected Works* and in various compilations), most of Luxemburg's (in Polish) could not be read and judged in the same way by those who know only English.

No one else responded to Davis's appeal, so he has done the job himself, while completing a second book of his own on nationalism covering the period from 1917 to the present (soon to be published by Monthly Review Press). Most of *The National Question* is devoted to the first five parts of a long six-part series Luxemburg wrote on "The National Question and Autonomy" in 1908-09, but it also contains two earlier articles by her (1896 and 1905) and excerpts from two later documents (1916 and 1918).

For this service we can only be grateful to Davis and the publisher. The superiority of Lenin's position was demonstrated by subsequent events more definitively than by what anyone wrote, but the present collection enables us to understand in detail the fallacies and weaknesses of Luxemburg's position, and to better appreciate Lenin's. (This, by the way, is not the view today of Davis, whose introduction

is more critical of Lenin and more sympathetic to Luxemburg than he was in his 1967 book. But I lack room here for a discussion of his introduction as a whole, except to say that I disagree with it on several points.)

Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919) was one of the towering figures of the Marxist movement, which has produced many remarkable people in its history of less than a century and a third. Her place among the greatest leaders was firmly established by the struggles she fought against reformism, opportunism, and social-patriotism in the German Social Democratic Party and the Second International. Her contributions to Marxist theory, tactics, and strategy are still required reading for people who want to obtain a rounded conception of Marxism. (The best compilation for this purpose is *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks* (Pathfinder Press, 1970); its introduction by editor Mary-Alice Waters contains an excellent critique of Luxemburg's views on the national question, and it has appendices on Luxemburg by Lenin and Trotsky.)

### Self-determination utopian?

In spite of her many contributions, Luxemburg was wrong, very wrong, on the national question. She held that the right of nations to self-determination was impossible under capitalism and unnecessary under socialism. She argued that in general there is *no right* of nations to self-determination, dismissing the very concept as utopian.

She was opposed to the independence of Poland (where she was born) from tsarist Russia, warning that support of this struggle by revolutionaries would lead them to support of bourgeois nationalism. Instead of independence for Poland, she advocated autonomy, as part of a Russian republic.

With few exceptions, she extended her opposition to independence to most areas of the world where national oppression was acute. And

she has the unhappy distinction of having formulated the essence of the sterile dilemma—class struggle or national struggle—that has plagued the Marxist movement throughout this century.

Luxemburg remained a Marxist while arguing these positions, and she presented them in the most effective and favorable light; it is no wonder that they were highly influential in the movement of her time. Not only was she a skilled polemicist but, as the present collection shows, she brought real erudition to her polemics, which are studied with brilliant Marxist insights.

Moreover, her intentions were patently revolutionary. She was an internationalist, she hated national oppression and chauvinism, she wanted to unite the workers of all countries and nationalities to abolish capitalist rule, she was concerned with defending and preserving the revolutionary character of Marxism. But everything she wanted and hoped for was subverted and contradicted by the positions she took.

Internationalism is not promoted when revolutionaries abstain from or turn their backs on national struggles; on the contrary, such abstention benefits only the bourgeois nationalists, the procapitalist forces. Hating national oppression is beside the point, a mere personal whim or moral preference, if it is not expressed in a political program designed to mobilise the workers to end national oppression. The kind of working-class unity that is required to abolish capitalism cannot be achieved by ignoring national or racial privilege or by promising to correct them after the revolution—that kind of unity can be achieved only by combating national and racist oppression before and during the revolution. And a Marxism that failed to develop the answers to the new problems posed by the emergence and dominance of modern imperialism would have been doomed to degeneration and utter irrelevance.

Why did a Marxist of Luxemburg's stature make such errors? It has been suggested that they stemmed from her passionate involvement in the internal struggles of the Polish movement, which continued after she left Poland as a student until her death in Germany thirty years later. The Social Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania, the Marxist organisation which she helped found, was throughout its existence (1893-1918) engaged in bitter conflict with the Polish Socialist Party—an increasingly opportunist party dedicated to achieving Polish independence—for hegemony among revolutionary workers in Poland and for recognition as the official section of the Second



International. According to this interpretation, the heat of these disputes swept Luxemburg into erroneous positions and generalisations on the national question.

Luxemburg at Karl Liebknecht congress (1905)

### Methodological weakness

There is probably some truth to this, but after reading *The National Question* I don't think it is the major part of the explanation. What struck me was a certain methodological weakness that was not unique with Luxemburg but was shared to some degree by the leaders of the prewar Second International as a whole. This defect used to be called "fatalism." More recent writers discussing the same phenomenon use the term "economism" (in a broad sense, not the narrow sense in which it was used around 1900 in the Russian Social Democratic movement) or "determinism" (also in a broad sense). None of the terms is completely satisfactory. Anyhow, by "fatalism" was meant a tendency toward passive avoidance or postponement of some difficult



problems in the belief (or hope) that time, or the further development of capitalism, or evolution, or even revolution would take care of them automatically. So why worry or bother about them now?

Looking back, we can see that the most notable manifestation of this tendency was in the area of theory and practice on the kind of party needed to abolish capitalism. Relatively little attention was given to this problem, even by the left wingers in the Second International (Lenin's Bolsheviks being the main exception), because it was assumed that this problem would solve itself more or less automatically as a result of the ripening of conditions, a spontaneous rise in the consciousness of the revolutionary workers, etc. (Meanwhile, the right wingers strengthened their hold on the party apparatuses, with the toleration of centrist theoreticians like Karl Kautsky, who supplied revolutionary formulas and rationalisations to cover this reality.)

Luxemburg was an opponent of Kautskyan fatalism and passivity before World War I, being at the scene of the internal German disputes enabled her to detect what lay behind Kautsky's revolutionary rhetoric earlier than Lenin did. She sensed what Kautsky implied when, in his polemics against the German left wing, he argued that the Marxist party was "a revolutionary party but not a party which makes revolutions" and that "the revolution is a natural phenomenon whose coming can neither be hastened nor delayed" (cited by Prof. Erich Matthias in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1968).

And yet her own thinking on the national question was definitely swayed by fatalist-economist-determinist logic: Poland was already integrated into the Russian economy so how could it be politically separate, and what was the sense of a political demand for separation that contradicted the economic trend? Socialism, which will end national oppression, was inevitable, so why complicate the tasks of achieving socialism by raising demands that might divide the Polish and Russian workers and couldn't be really and fully achieved under capitalism anyhow?

Other important examples of this passive-postponement tendency in Luxemburg's time were the official Socialist Party position in the United States on the oppression of Blacks (your problems will be solved when we achieve socialism; meanwhile, all we can offer you is an invitation to support socialism and the class struggle), and the widespread indifference or hostility inside the Second International toward the strong wave of feminism in the early years of this century (of course we want women in our movement but you can't really expect us to put



Lenin

your interests on the same level as those of the industrial workers, whose historical mission is to end class rule and thereby all oppression).

Part of Lenin's genius as a revolutionary thinker and political leader was that he did not counterpose things that are not really opposites and should not be counterposed (and it was from this side of Lenin that Trotsky learned the fertile truth that national struggle is a form of class struggle).

Internationalism, Lenin understood, is not necessarily inconsistent with national movements, on the contrary, it is often achieved only through the struggles of national movements. He agreed with Luxemburg that socialism will bring the end of national frontiers, barriers, and divisions; but he perceived that before we can get socialism there's the little problem of making a revolution, and that may be possible only by supporting movements to break up the capitalist empires through the restoration of suppressed nations or the creation of new ones.

There have been two major strands of thought or ways of looking at national questions in the Marxist movement in the twentieth century. One is the Leninist, the other Luxemburgist. The latter had considerable strength not only in the Second International before World War I but also among the Bolsheviks, before 1917, and in the leadership of the Third International in its

revolutionary years. It was in a minority there, but it persisted as an unacknowledged influence and "tradition," surviving into the 1930s before Stalin extirpated everything that was not completely Stalinist. Isaac Deutscher was one of the communists who carried this influence over into the Trotskyist movement; thirty years later, he was still unable to make heads or tails out of Black nationalism in the United States.

Trotsky, who thought Lenin's work on the national question was one of his major contributions to the Marxist movement, tried to imbue the Fourth International with the Leninist spirit and the Leninist policy.

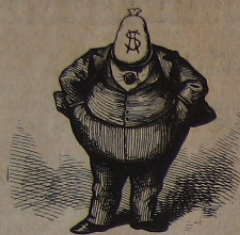
The Fourth International is more correct on national questions than any other international tendency, but even it has important weaknesses in this area. For example, I do not think it has fully developed the Leninist potential of the demand Trotsky raised in 1939 for an independent Soviet Ukraine. The Soviet Union is a prisonhouse of nations if ever there was one, with the Soviet bureaucracy imposing national oppression on most of Eastern Europe as well as

the former tsarist empire. The right of self-determination for these oppressed nations is central to the political revolution against Stalinism that the Fourth International stands for in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, but the struggle to achieve this right gets too little attention from the leadership of the Fourth International. In my opinion the explanation for this failure is a Luxemburgist underappreciation of the national question in degenerated and deformed workers states.

There is no organised tendency or movement today that considers itself Luxemburgist on the national question. But strands of her arguments and her political attitude persist among many sectarian and abstentionist groups in the radical movement that counterpose "working-class unity" to national struggles and nationalism, even though some of them have never read Luxemburg and may be incapable of following the nuances of her thought. This is another reason why it is useful to have her views in English at last.



## End the rule of the moneybags



Join the fight for socialism  
at the Socialist Youth Alliance  
7th National Conference

May 21-23  
Queens College Melb. Uni.

The SYA Seventh National Conference is for young people who are prepared to stand up against the power and privileges of the money bags—the capitalist class. It's a conference for young people ready to fight back against unemployment and the cut-backs in education. The conference will be attended by members and supporters of the SYA from right around the country who are actively involved in these struggles.

The Crisis Confronting Youth—a Socialist Strategy to Fight Back will be the main topic of discussion. This is the draft political resolution of the SYA which will be presented to the conference.

Other sessions of the SYA conference will discuss the world revolution today—Palestine and South Africa, the Tasks of the Student Movement, and Building the

Socialist Movement. As well, there is a panel of speakers on the Malaysian student movement and workshops for high school students, young workers and women. Feature talks will be presented on Feminism and Revolution and the 60th Anniversary of the Russian Revolution.

The live-in conference will be held at Queens College, Melbourne University—accommodation will cost \$8 per night (\$16 for the conference weekend) and some private billeting will be available. For details on accommodation, travel and the conference schedule contact the SYA national office, PO Box 160, Glebe 2037 (phone (02) 6602251) or SYA in Melbourne at 361 Lt Bourke St (phone 671225).

Come along to the SYA Seventh National Conference and join the fight for socialism.

## News of the Fourth International

### Women in India: A New Awakening

By Elizabeth Stone

On a trip to India last year I had the opportunity to learn something about the situation of women in India and the impact of feminist ideas there.

There is no organised feminist movement in India such as exists in the United States, but many educated Indian women are becoming interested in feminism, and I saw numerous signs of a growing mood of opposition to the extreme oppression Indian women face.

I had the most extensive discussions about this with women who are members and supporters of the Communist League, a revolutionary socialist organisation in India.

These women are staunch feminists. In explaining what women's liberation meant to them, they pointed out that for women like themselves to be politically active it took a certain degree of feminist consciousness. Despite the fact that India has a woman prime minister as well as female legislators, there is still much prejudice against women becoming involved in politics.

Women socialists also have to overcome various personal obstacles. One of the biggest problems is that they are expected to remain under the tight supervision of either their parents or their husbands. It is not the custom, nor is it easy economically, for unmarried women to have their own apartments. Women are supposed to stay in their parents' home until they are married. And when they are married, it is usually to a man chosen by their parents.

The women in the Communist League are in rebellion against such practices. They were founding members of the Study and Struggle Alliance, a revolutionary Marxist youth organisation. They oppose being married off at an early age by their parents. They are standing up for their rights to live their own lives and are training themselves to speak publicly, to write, and to do those things necessary to develop themselves as human beings and as fighters for socialism.

Most of these women do not wear saris (the

traditional long dresses) even for special occasions because they feel they are too constricting. "My main means of transportation is my bicycle," one woman told me, and "just try riding a bicycle in a sari. Some women do it, but it's dangerous."

Women in the Communist League told me that an increasing number of young women like themselves are questioning traditional women's roles. Students and working women are in the forefront of this. They described a demonstration several years ago in Bombay of thousands of working women protesting the requirement by some businesses that women employees be unmarried. The slogan of the demonstrators was, "We want jobs and husbands."

They also said that many young women are carrying out individual battles within their own families for the right to go to school, to work, to live in a hostel, or to marry whomever they want.

A recent survey made by a team of professors revealed that most students favored equal rights for women, but there are still many misconceptions about the concept of feminism. One of the Communist League women told me that "even people who claim to support 'feminism' often will still justify the domestic slavery of women. For example, many educated men don't approve of their wives getting a job."

A resolution passed by the Communist League in 1972 lists some of the reasons for this new awakening. There are now increased (although still very limited) educational and employment opportunities for women. Inflation has forced many men to allow their wives to work. Birth control is more available, giving women who use it more freedom to plan their lives. And increased participation of women in government has given women more confidence in their ability to take part in public life.

The rise of the women's movement internationally has also had some influence. The designation of 1975 as International Women's Year sparked seminars and debates, as well as the



publication of articles on women in the Indian press.

I met with a group of around twenty-five women medical students who were very interested in the progress of the women's movement in the United States and internationally. These women told me that it was common in their circles to hear discussions about the changing roles of women and changing relationships between men and women. At the Women's University in Bombay, a Research Unit on Women's Studies has been set up. Women in this unit, under the direction of Dr Neera Desai, have published a handbook on women in India which includes valuable information on the status of women and recommendations on what is needed to win women's equality.

One of the most striking facts pointed to in this handbook is the ratio of men to women in the Indian population. Unlike in the industrialised countries, where women tend to outnumber men, in India there are more males than females.



Statistics for 1971 show, for example, that for children up to the age of fourteen there were 937 females for every 1000 males. For the total population, there were 932 females for every 1000 males.

The authors of the handbook assert that this unfavorable sex ratio is a direct product of discrimination against women from infancy on. Girl babies are not valued or welcomed in India as are boys. Under conditions of extreme poverty this means that the food, medical care, and attention given female infants and children is even more meagre than that given boys. Females die in greater numbers. And as women mature, the hazards of childbearing with inadequate medical attention add to the death rate.

Other statistics included in the handbook are just as graphic in showing the depth and brutality of the oppression Indian women face. Only 18 per cent of women in India are literate. This compares to 39 per cent literacy for men. Most girls are expected to help out with household chores at an early age and it is common for very young girls to leave school entirely to do work around the house or to help out in an emergency.

Most Indian women are forced into a situation of complete economic dependence on their husbands and families. Although employment of women is increasing, only 13 per cent of Indian women work. This means that most women never have the experience of earning their own paycheck. Of those women who do hold jobs, 80 per cent are agricultural workers.

Marriage is considered essential for all women. Statistics for 1971 show that only 1.9 per cent of the women in India from the ages of 25 to 30 had never been married.

Women are often considered an economic burden on their families and this is one of the reasons for the persistence of early marriages and the dowry paid by a woman's father to her husband at the time of marriage. The practice of paying dowry remains widespread in India although this varies considerably between different castes and religions.

I was told by women in the Communist League that there were scandals involving husbands who murdered their wives so they could marry again and receive a second dowry.

Because of the large population and size of India, there are great divergences in the way women are treated between different areas of the country, different castes and classes, different religions, and between the rural areas and the city.

Among the most exploited women are those of the scheduled (most oppressed) castes. They are subject to the most physical abuse and the hardest, most backbreaking labor and have the least access to education and medical care.

## Feudal Traditions

Many of the antiwomen practices in India originated in precapitalist feudal society. In Indian feudal society women had no rights and were considered scarcely human. Polygamy was widespread. A woman's role was to produce sons and to serve as a slave to her husband and family. She was not supposed to participate in public or religious life and "purdah," the custom of women remaining in seclusion under the veil, helped enforce this. The lack of any identity for the woman outside that of servant of her husband was drawn to its logical conclusion in the "sati," the custom practiced by some women of killing themselves at the time of the death of their husbands.

The feudal traditions are reflected in language as well. "There are many idioms that are used to humiliate and degrade women," one of the Communist League women told me. "For example, women are referred to in these idioms as 'beasts,' or as 'trashbaskets.' Women are considered to be less intelligent and lacking in common sense. They are not encouraged to participate in discussions. They can't argue out their case. As far as voting goes, they are expected to vote as their husbands advise."

In the period under British rule, various Indian reformers fought valiantly to end these and other abuses. Some of the most brutal practices such as the sati were undercut and education was made available to a small number of women. But progress was limited.

The struggle for independence from Britain gave a big impetus to the fight for women's rights. Many women came out of domestic seclusion to participate in this struggle and as a result began to get a vision of a freer life.

After independence, there were more gains. There was an upturn in the education available to both men and women, and women were granted the right to vote and participate in politics. Some women were elected to office.

Women were explicitly recognised as equal in the Constitution, something which is still not the case in many industrialised countries. But unfortunately, along with the equal rights provision in the Constitution came another provision that in effect contradicted it. This was a law stating that the customs of various religious communities concerning marriage and other such personal matters would be respected. This meant that Hindu women, Muslims, Parsis, Christians, and women of other religions would be ruled by old customs, many of which originated in the feudal period.

To this day, there is no civil code in India that legislates for all women on such questions as

divorce. An important demand of advocates of women's rights is that such a code be adopted. There is also a need to enforce laws that exist against such abuses as child marriage and dowry.

In 1955, a Hindu marriage law was passed that gave certain rights to Hindu women. It outlawed polygamy, set the minimum marriage age at fifteen, and made some provisions for divorce. Despite this, divorce is still uncommon and is considered highly undesirable and even shameful for Hindu women.

There has been no change in the legal status of Muslim women since independence. According to Muslim law, a man can still have as many as four wives. In Muslim areas it is still common to see women with veils covering their faces.

Christian law also has not been changed since independence. In order to get a divorce a Christian woman must establish more grounds than a man.

## Other demands

Along with agitation for legal equality, advocates of women's rights in India have raised other demands aimed at overcoming social and economic discrimination.

Some of these demands were outlined in a memorandum sent by a group of women in Kanpur to the prime minister and president of India on the occasion of International Women's Year. To provide better education for women, these women called for free higher education for women, free busing for female students, hostel facilities for college women, child-care facilities for student mothers, and an increase in coeducational schools.

To open up more employment opportunities, they called on the government to give as many jobs as possible to women in the fields of education, health, medicine, social welfare, and telegraph services. They also suggested that special service centres be set up to employ women trained at polytechnic and craft schools, with the products produced in this way to be marketed by the centres. Other demands were for a shorter workweek for women, longer maternity leaves, and hostels for single or employed women in every major city.

They also proposed that a ministry of women's affairs be established by the government to mobilise public opinion against "false concepts, beliefs, traditions and prejudices restricting women's freedom."

Little is being done in India today to meet these and other needs of women. In fact, the policies of the Gandhi government and the ruling class in India have had the effect of maintaining women's inferior status.



The system of private profit, which prevails in India today, does not provide jobs for millions of poverty-stricken male workers, much less open up large numbers of new jobs for women. Women remain peripheral to the labor force, used as a reserve of labor, which can be pulled in and out of the job market seasonally and as the needs of the economy change. The miserable wages for women that result from this are a source of profit for landowners and other employers.

The Indian educational system is a bysmal for both men and women, yet there are no signs that anything is being done to change this. Instead, the government is pouring even more money into its military machine and expanding domestic police.

Even in areas where the government has taken some initiative, such as on birth control, the benefits to women are limited.

The government's birth control program is not aimed at giving women the right to control their reproduction, but toward population control. Thus, along with making birth control more available, the government has a policy of forcing families to have fewer children. Forced population control measures, including forced sterilisation, and economic measures against families with more than three children, have been stepped up since the emergency decrees of a year and a half ago as part of the government's policy of blaming economic failures on population growth.

Little has been done to mobilise public opinion against backward attitudes in regard to women. One reflection of the reactionary role played by the ruling class in this regard is the Indian movies. India has one of the largest film industries in the world, and the movies that are churned out perpetuate all kinds of prejudices and reactionary ideas. While in India I saw what was described as one of the best of the new Hindi films. It reminded me of a Hollywood escapist romance out of the 1950s, with the theme being the dependence of a woman on her man.

Women are portrayed in films and magazines as sex objects just as they are in the United States, although the government's puritanical "moral" code forbids any kind of sexual activity (even kissing) on the screen.

The films are also racist. The ideal of beauty held up is that of a light-skinned, Western-looking woman—a woman that does not look like most women in India. As if this weren't enough, I was also told that in recent years, under the influence of Hollywood, there is a big emphasis not only on the "beauty" of the facial characteristics of film stars but also on body shape, adding to the insecurities of women not having the "prescribed" shape.

## Revolutionary change needed

The 1972 resolution of the Communist League on women's liberation points out that it will take revolutionary changes in Indian society to root out the deepgoing prejudices and oppression women face. The present rulers of India will not end women's oppression any more than they can end poverty or wipe out caste and religious oppression.

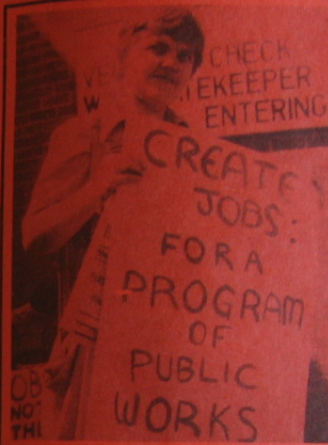
Although the Indian government has up to now been somewhat successful in maintaining a progressive "socialist" image, the mask is beginning to slip. The uprisings, strike struggles, and electoral challenges, which were on the rise before the declaration of the emergency a year and a half ago, and the repression that followed are signs of this.

Although still not in great numbers, women have played a role in the struggles of the last few years. During the 1974 national railroad strike, wives of railroad workers supported their husbands by surrounding the police vans ready to take them away. There have been demonstrations by women against rising prices and strikes in various industries employing women.

The involvement of women in struggle has also been reflected in the growing number of women political prisoners. Female prisoners often receive worse treatment than males due to the prejudices against women being involved in politics. Thousands of women actively participated in the Naxalite movement (a Maoist-oriented peasant and guerrilla movement) in Bengal and Kerala. Many are still in jail suffering brutal torture.

It cannot be predicted how or at what pace working-class and peasant struggles will develop in India in the future, but there is no question that women will be an important part of these struggles. We can also expect to see more struggles that will raise women's rights issues.

In discussing with Indian socialists about the potential for women's struggles in India, the example of the Chinese revolution was often brought up. In China, the mobilisation of women against feudal oppression and capitalist exploitation was an important component of the revolution. Similarly in India, the masses of working women and peasants represent a potentially powerful force for revolutionary change.



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